



Introduction

James 5-1 Peter 1

Well today is three things. It's 1. Easter Sunday, it's 2. the last

message in the book of James and it's 3. my last message as preaching pastor here at FCBC. This is a hard message for me to preach.

Because on the one hand I have deep, deep, deep sorrow that this is my last Sunday with you all in this way.

- I mean my heart is bleeding on the inside.
- I was talking to my dad this week about what I was experiencing. I was like, "Dad, I don't know what's wrong with me." And he said, "I know what's wrong with you; you're grieving."
- He's not wrong. I am. There's tremendous loss in my soul. 17 years of my life is invested here. So many relationships, so many fun times together in God's Word, so many great times of worship, so much truth discovered.
- And so I'm bleeding out on the inside.
This is not exactly what I would call a "formula for joy."

Half of me is like, "Are you kidding? You're in no condition to preach this Sunday!"

But then over here, there's this incredible love for resurrection Sunday which has always been the high point of the Christian calendar and it's always been my favorite Sunday of the year. I just absolutely love Resurrection Sunday.

- Because the resurrection is the central point in Christian theology,
- It's the evidence that we are freed from the power of sin,
- It's the proof that the penalty of sin has been erased,
- It's the great hope that every Christian has as he approaches death and the grave.
- The resurrection IS THE defining cornerstone event in all Christian history and the hope of the world.

So all that over here says: It's time to celebrate.

And so all week long, I've been witness to a war. These are two very strong armies. What's a man to do about this?

I suppose nothing because this has a way of making everything that is said this morning a bit more real. This internal battle of mine is really just a metaphor for the internal battle that all of us experience by virtue of the fact that this world is broken. What do we do about it? Can we celebrate in sorrow? Can we celebrate in the midst of a broken world?

- If your best friend has been taken from you by death, can you rejoice?
- If you are suffering deeply as a result of someone cheating you, taking advantage of your kindness, or sinning against you can you rejoice?
- If you are in misery because of an illness that won't leave you alone, can you be grateful?
- If the brokenness you experience is literally unfixable and there is no hope that you will ever experience freedom in this life, can you still sing praise?

Suffering presents us with a decision. Suffering is a fork in the road. This path goes East and this path goes West. The two forks lead in opposite directions and I must choose. Warning: life is too short to make a mistake.

Here's the fork: does my suffering interpret the goodness of God or does goodness of God interpret my suffering? Is my suffering evidence that God is not in control, is not good, and that he does not love me. Or is the fact that God is in control, God is good and God loves me the very TRUTH needed to properly interpret my suffering.

Here's what every preacher of the Gospel has been sent to

proclaim: OUR EXPERIENCE, as hard as it may be, does not change the GOSPEL TRUTH. It's the other way around. This GOSPEL TRUTH, changes our EXPERIENCE of suffering.

Can we sing praise in suffering? You want to know what the answer is? You bet we can. Can we rejoice in our affliction? Absolutely we can. Yes. Because there is a GOSPEL TRUTH that changes everything. Yes, life is difficult. Yes, we all suffer.

But JESUS CHRIST HAS RISEN FROM THE DEAD. AND BECAUSE THAT IS TRUE, EVERYTHING HAS CHANGED. That objective truth exists beyond and above your experience, it exists outside your experience. It is real and solid and has shaping power. And because it's real, it can change you.

Listen, this might sound obvious but just let it land: For something to change your life it has to be real.

Review

If you were with us last week, we were in the book of James chapter 5 and we reviewed this incredible scene from the top of Mt Carmel, this showdown between

- on the one side: 850 prophets of Baal and Ashera VS
- the other side: the one prophet of God Elijah.

And the contest was established to determine which God was God of the storm. And here were the rules:

Elijah said, "We each get a bull. We each get wood. We each get an altar. but neither of us gets fire." The God who answers by fire, he is

the true God.

And we watched as the prophets of Baal danced and raved. We watched as they screamed and cried out. We watched as they demonstrated their sincerity by inflicting pain upon themselves and cutting themselves. On and on they went for 8 hours. And yet their god did not answer them. And we asked, why? Why was it that Baal did not answer?

- Was it for lack of effort? No, they exerted maximum effort. Herculean effort.
- Was it for lack of personal sacrifice? No their personal sacrifice was extreme. They cut themselves and the text said that blood came gushing out of them.
- Was it for lack of belief? No, they fully believed. They were all in. They were completely invested.
- Was it for lack of devoted followers? No they had a tremendous following. 450 prophets and thousands of worshipers.

But Baal was not answering. Why did their god not answer?
Answer: Because their god wasn't real.

And because he was not real he could not care. And because he was not real he had no control of anything.

Truth is harsh. It just doesn't care about your sincerity. The truth doesn't care about your creative passion. The truth isn't even a thing that it could care. The truth just is. However much you deny the truth, the truth just goes on existing. And if you don't align your life with the truth the truth will break you.

We speak of sinners breaking the law; but is not better to say that the law breaks the sinner? The law just is. God just is. Truth just is.

So again, we do that review to make this obvious but needed point: For something to change your life it has to be real.

- If your hair is messy, you need a real comb to get the tangles out.
- If your car is low on oil, you need real oil to lubricate the engine.
- If your stomach is empty you need real food to fill your belly.

And listen carefully. We have two very REAL problems. Sin has destroyed our soul. And death will destroy our life. And to fix those two very real problems we need a REAL Savior.

Resurrection TRUTH

Christianity is not an tradition, idea, a philosophy or a political agenda.

- Christianity has traditions.
- It contains ideas.
- Philosophies arise from it.
- Certain political ideas are favored because of it.

But most certainly, none of these things get at what it is. Christianity is at it's very core a TRUTH-CLAIM. It's an appeal to REASON to align your life with TRUE events that happened in HISTORY.

Christianity tries to get men and women to grapple with the implications of the historical claim that Jesus Christ really was God, really did die, and really did rise from the grave. And because that is REAL:

- it has tremendous power to save you if regarded, and
- tremendous power to destroy you if ignored.

Christianity is a TRUTH-claim that hinges on ONE THING - the

REALITY of the resurrection, if the resurrection is true, it's all true. If it's false, it's all false. There's nothing in between. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, if Christ did not raise from the dead then we are still in our sins, everyone who died is still dead and we are of all men most to be pitied.

Everything hinges on the resurrection.

So this morning we are going to establish three implications of the resurrection and then we'll close by looking at the last 2 verses of the book of James.

So let's start with the resurrection implications. If the resurrection is true, if the gospel accounts are HISTORY, here's what that means for us.

IF THE GOSPELS ARE HISTORY

1. Jesus is Alive

If Jesus is alive that means that you can't go to his grave. You can't find his body. That means that his existence did not come to an end.

It means right now, he's alive. I want you to get your mind around the significance of a claim like this and what it means for the Christian faith and what it means for.

Let me give you an illustration. Let's say your spouse goes for a drive and then goes missing for some reason. And of course your worried sick and the days turn to weeks which turn to months which turns to years. And you've nearly given up but then, one day, a mysterious letter shows up. It appears it's written by your spouse. The very evidence of the letter gives this very strong evidence that they are alive. Your heart would leap: is it real? But then you look at it more closely and the doubts arise.

- You question the authenticity of the handwriting.
- You might question the sentence structure. I can't recall them forming sentences like that.
- Maybe even a detail or two seems like it might not be entirely true.
- And pretty soon you are seriously doubting it's authenticity

But then you get a knock on the door and standing before you in flesh in blood is your spouse!

Suddenly, all the questions vaporize. Let me ask, "Why do the questions disappear?" There was never resolution on the handwriting or grammar question. But you don't need it, because the REAL presence of the person resolves every other question. You know the questions are answerable because you have standing before you the one who contains all answers. They are the answer.

When we talk about the place of the resurrection of Jesus Christ in the Christian faith we are talking about the same sort of argument-silencing absolute authority. If the resurrection is true, it's all true.

- What about the textual accuracy of the OT and the NT?
- What about polygamy or slavery in the OT?
- What about the age of the earth and how that goes together with science?
- What about bad things happening to good people?
- What about...

There's a certain posture behind those questions: "If you can't answer me these question, then I can't believe in God."

Those are all really good questions. They are all fair questions. But if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, well, you have your answer.

It's similar to turning off a basketball game at halftime when your favorite team is down by 30 at half. And you think it's over. And then later you look at the final score and see that they won. You think, there's no possible way. How did they do that? Because you didn't watch the game you don't know HOW but because you see the final score, you know THAT THEY DID.

The resurrected Christ is like that final winning score. I've got a lot of questions, I don't know HOW this works, but if the resurrection is true, there IS an answer. He obviously has answers. He contains the answers. He is the answer.

The only thing that matters at that point is submission. The only thing is to sit down, shut up and see what he has to say. Let his mouth speak and answer your questions.

Answer Us With Fire

The resurrection is God's answer. The people of Israel asked the question, "How do we know which God is true? Is it YHWH or

Baal?" So they setup a contest.

YHWH of the OT answered Elijah with fire.

We have a NT equivalent of this: On the cross we have a showdown between all the forces of evil of the universe, all the darkness of sin, the horror of death, Satan himself. All those forces of evil press in upon Jesus. That's the side of evil.

And then you have over here Jesus, alone, by himself. And here's the rules of the contest.

Whoever can rise from the dead, he is God. God in the person of Jesus Christ, answers with the lightning of resurrection. Whoever can live forever and overcome our greatest enemy, death itself. That person is God! Jesus Christ has done it. Jesus is Alive! It's the decisive, irrefutable evidence that what Jesus claims is true. He's the LIVING God.

Prayer

So there is an apologetic use of the resurrection. You know what else it means if Jesus Christ is ALIVE? You can talk to him.

If you have ever had someone you love die, you can visit their grave, you can talk to them but you know they are not there. There's no response. You are talking to the air. They aren't there. And they certainly can't do anything for you.

But if Jesus Christ rose from the dead, if he's alive, that means you can talk to him. He can actually do something.

In the context of the book of James, why did James take us back to Mt Carmel. Why did he take us back to that showdown between Baal and YHWH? Because he wanted to remind us that there is a God who listens to the righteous. You can pray like Elijah, and Jesus because he's ALIVE will listen to you.

Let me illustrate the implication of the resurrection. Pray with me: Jesus Christ, God very God, we pray to you this Easter Sunday and we praise you. We praise you for your victory over death. We praise you that you love us. We worship you. We give our lives to you. We love you!

Thank you Jesus. That is not play acting. Jesus Christ, the resurrected Lord, hears our prayers, he's listening to us now. He sees us. He understands us. You can have a personal relationship with the God of the Universe because he is alive.

So that's the first thing the resurrection demonstrates. Here's the second. If Jesus Christ is Alive that MEANS that:

IF THE GOSPELS ARE HISTORY

1. Jesus is Alive
2. Sin is Dead

Now listen, very few of us understand the seriousness of the sin problem? Why? Because it's all we've ever known. It's like a man or woman born blind wondering what they are missing out on.

But just because you do not know how handicapped you are, does not mean you are not handicapped. Sin has mamed us.

Sin has consequence. As surely as you cannot leap out of a building without consequence, we cannot sin without consequence. And the consequence of sin is every form of brokenness we experience on the earth.

- The brokenness of every relationship is a result of sin
- The selfishness that destroys marriage
- The lustful looks of infidelity is the result of sin
- Death itself, we are told in the Bible is the result of sin.

We started this message by reminding ourselves of evil and suffering? Why is there even such a thing as evil? When we are

young and protected in our parents homes the world seems so safe. But as we grow older, wooden swords turn to real swords, pretend bullets turn to real bullets, we see real death, real suffering. We see just how cold and empty people really are. We see people drowning in loneliness. We see how cruel the world is.

And the response of the heart is, “This all seems so unjust.” In fact, this is the number one reason people reject the Christian faith. It’s the number one reason. Why do bad things happen to good people?

Listen, the Bible has an answer for that.

The first thing to say is that your sense of justice is from God. That’s a right response. If it could be demonstrated that bad things happen to good people then you would be justified in dismissing the Christian faith.

But you want to know something. Bad things don’t happen to good people? Bad things happen to bad people. There’s only bad people.

This is what the Bible teaches:

Romans 3

Romans 3:23, for all have sinned and fall short of the
glory of God,

Now if you want to be outraged at injustice, let your outrage focus on Jesus the Christ. There was one good person. And bad things did happen to him.

We read about on good Friday.

Here is Jesus, in anticipation of calvary, amazed at the cup of suffering that awaited. He held that cup in his trembling hands, his soul sorrowful even unto death. Is there no other way?

There is no other way. So here the perfect lamb of God is nailed to a tree, hoisted into the air to suffer.

Here the perfect lamb of God hangs in a buzzing cloud of flies. His flayed back pressed against the tree, the suffering of suffocation as His body droops, the repeated torture of dislocated sockets, the raw wounds the only lever upon which to lift himself to gain breath. Here is the lamb of God plunged into the abyss of anguish. Forgive us

Lord for ever coming to this moment with dry eyes.

You want to talk about not fair. You want to talk about injustice. That is unjust. You want to talk about bad things happening to good people. What did he ever do to deserve this? There was only one good person and bad things did happen to him but here's the difference: he volunteered. Why?

1 Peter 3

1 Peter 3:18, For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit,

He volunteered to endure this suffering to bear the sins of the world for those who would believe in Him. Jesus died to take away our sins.

He died so that he might BRING US TO GOD.

What does that mean? Here's what it means. It means that life is ours:

IF THE GOSPELS ARE HISTORY

1. Jesus is Alive
2. Sin is Dead
3. Life is Ours

What is the greatest philosophical question that has ever been asked? And by the way this is not even slightly debated. All philosophers agree that this is THE great philosophical question. It doesn't matter if you are atheistic or theistic. It doesn't matter if you are hindu, muslim, Christian, anamist. It doesn't matter your culture, your family background, your race, gender, anything.

1. Every single person that has ever been born has asked this question?
2. Statistically speaking, we spend the most time thinking about this question.
3. Almost all, if not all, of our decisions are based on our answer to this question.

What is the good life?

In other words, what is the best possible way to live that brings us the highest level of fulfillment? In other word, how can I be happy? How can I find satisfaction? What is the good life?

What binds every human on planet earth together is we are all in constant pursuit of the good life.

Here's what's interesting about our culture: We live in a society which has completely jettisoned the idea that there is an **ABSOLUTE** answer to this question. We have just untethered ourselves from absolutes. The thinking goes like this: the good life could be different for you than it is for me.

The good life is something internal to you. It's subjective. And you might be wired such that the good life could be experienced this way. And I might be wired such that the good life is experienced this other way. And so who am I to tell **YOU** how to achieve that inner sense of well-being? We live in a culture in which not only our good life

experience but even our identities are defined by personal choice. Anything that comes from the outside and tries to impose upon either my identity or my happiness is a threat to the good life.

And so life is one giant experiment where we hope we can stumble into happiness.

Let's not experiment. Let's use reason. There's not multiple ways to solve the problem of being thirsty. To a thirsty person we don't say, "Well, the solution to your thirst problem might be different for you than it is for me." Why? Because we are biologically made to solve the thirst problem with water. If your thirsty you need water.

And in a similar way, there are not multiple ways to solve our spiritual thirst. We are spiritually made to solve our spiritual thirst problem with Jesus Christ. Jesus says, "I am the way, the truth and the life." THAT IS THE GOOD LIFE. You want life? Jesus says, "Then come to me."

God tells us over and over again in his Word, death this way; life this way. All the commands of God in the Bible are fences to protect you from death and keep you on the path of joy.

Do you see why we are mad as a culture? Do you see why we have just absolutely lost our mind?

We have people changing their gender thinking it will make them happy, dressing up as furries, self-identifying in a thousand ways thinking that this will save them. But they have untethered themselves from reality.

Full STOP. Let's stop it. Life is being offered to us. Take it!

The Christian message is this, both eternal physical life and eternal soul life, the only TRUE good life, IS found through Jesus Christ.

The TRUTH we are here to celebrate is that there is truth.

The Conclusion

What does all this mean for you and I? You might not like the fact there is objective truth. In fact, nobody likes it. Truth is like a blade that cuts if your in it's path. Truth grates against you. But before you reject it out of hand, simply because it is uncomfortable, think about the implications of rejecting truth.

TRUTH just exists. It's like gravity. You can't change it. It exists outside of you. It doesn't care if you exist in the same way that gravity doesn't care. It will do what it will do regardless of whether you are here or not here. It will act upon you whether you think it applies to you are not. It just is.

If the gospel is truth we can't change it. It's not ours to change. It's not ours to tinker with. We don't own it.

Don't say, "I could never submit to a God who sends people to hell.." Let me ask you, "Would you use that same logic with a semi truck on the freeway." I could never submit to a semi-truck that kill people that are in it's way. I refuse to move off the freeway. Do you see the insanity of that reasoning. The question is this: is it real? Is it true? Will it destroy me or not? Does it offer life or not?

To try to change the gospel is trying to argue with a steaming locomotive. We don't break the laws of God, the laws of God break us. We are the breakable things.

What if there is a truth that either SHATTERS your LIFE or HEALS your LIFE?

Now all that was setup for our closing two verses in the book of James. These are the most unlikely of all verses for Easter. I doubt an Easter message in the history of the Christian religion has focused on these two verses. But we are going to go for it. What are you going to do, “Fire me?”

James is going to close the book out on a little bit of a cliffhanger. And to point out the cliffhanger I’m going to get just slightly technical for a second. The last sentence of the book is written with subjunctive verbs. What is a subjunctive verb? It’s a verb that has to do with something that could be real, but isn’t yet real. It has to do with an action that has not yet occurred. It has to do with a future possibility but as it stands now it’s an unreality.

James 5:19-20, My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back,

20 let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

The future for the wandering sinner is hanging right here in the

balance. What will happen to this wandering sinner? That's the question.

Listen, there are many in the room here who have wandered from the truth. And what is the consequence of wandering from the truth both according to this text and also according to logic? Answer: You die.

Are you miserable? Do you feel lost? Do you feel unsatisfied? You have wandered from the truth. You have wandered from Jesus Christ, the WAY THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE. That's why you are dying. You've cut yourself off from the vine. You cut yourself off from the source of life.

But guess what? Today, you're coming back. Today you are going stop the pursuit of other gods. Your going to give up. And your going to come back to Jesus Christ, the WAY THE TRUTH AND THE LIFE. You're coming back to the fountain of Life. You're coming back to the God who loves you and cares for you and has given his very life for you. Your coming back. All of us. Everyone in this room is coming back to the truth, the truth that changes everything.

This place is a place of rescue. Jesus Christ has brought you here today to rescue you. To give you the Truth in the person of Jesus Christ. This is a place of healing.

Revival starts today by beholding JESUS CHRIST.

Do you see him. Do you see that he demonstrated his love for you dying for you? Do you see that you can be free of the power of sin.

You want to know what LIFE is?

- Life is knowing that nothing can separate you from the Love of God.
- Life is living for something that lasts.
- Life is being part of a mission that cannot fail.
- Life is being part of a movement that will change the world. You want to know why you will change the world? Because you have seen the Lord.

Let's stop trying to do it on our own.

- You cannot save your marriage,
- save your kids,
- transform your church,
- repair your family,
- overcome your sin patterns,
- absolve your guilt or condemnation,
- resolve your loneliness or
- deliver yourself from evil.

Turn to the fountain of life. Come thirsty. Drink deeply. There are stories. And then there are true stories. There is fiction and then there is non-fiction. This is REAL. This changes everything.

And maybe all this feels like a dream. It feels too good. Frankly you're scared to believe it because if it's not true it would undo you completely.

That's understandable. It's understandable to fear being fooled. Counterfeits are everywhere. But don't let your fear of counterfeits prevent you from drinking from the fountain of everlasting life.

The degree to which we will be happy is the degree to which we align ourselves with the Truth. And the truth is Jesus Christ has died to set you free of your sins and give you life.

Let's let the Scriptures reduce this down to it's absolute most simple form. John 3:16.

John 3

John 3:16-17, For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Here's what you need to do. You just need to respond to Christ today. You might say to yourself, "I don't know how to do that?" Of course you don't. Nobody does. I don't know how to move toward God. I don't even know where he is. Of course you don't. But he knows where you are. God is saving you.

The key isn't to do just the exact right religious motions in the exact right sequence. Life begins when you discover that you ACTUALLY want the resurrection life that Jesus is offering. Faith has already begun if you WANT to believe. To want to believe is evidence that life has already started inside you. If you sense you want this, friend, you are beings saved.

Jesus is already beginning the resurrection in you. In our natural

condition, none of us will never seek the Lord, so if we find ourselves wanting it, he's working. Think of it. The living God... working in us, even now.

Listen, life is being offered to all of us in the room. And it's the greatest life of all. I have been a pastor for many years now and watched a lot of people die. I have never personally seen or ever heard of a dying person who, on his death bed, regretted he was a christian. You want to know why? Because nobody regrets being satisfied.

Can't you see what is being offered. Life! Life! Life! Take your Bible and read the book of John. Read of Jesus. Behold him and drink. Live.

If God is working in your heart right now and you want to respond then come up here and pray with the prayer team. Maybe you feel you want to pray with those who are responding. Then come down here. Come down here and pray!

Maybe your scared and saying, I want to come but I don't know what to do. Of course you don't. Nobody does. Who cares. How can you loose if you have the creator of the Universe ready to embrace you. How can you loose if you have the Great Shepherd just ready to take your hand and walk with you and love you. You can't loose.



FAITH *that* WORKS

THE BOOK OF JAMES