

Resurrection Reality
Hope Is Served
April 24, 2011

Good morning everyone ... and happy Easter. I'm sure that many of you are planning to go have dinner with family or friends this afternoon or maybe you're the one hosting the family and friends. That's what Jetta and I are doing. Two of our daughters and their husbands are here from out of town this weekend. It's been awesome, especially since they worked in my yard all day yesterday!

But for many people, that's all Easter is. It's a family gathering a lot like the 4th of July without the fireworks or like Christmas without the gifts. Yet the Bible tells us that Easter is something much greater; something that cannot be denied simply by ignoring it.

Easter is the astoundingly good news that the love of God for this world is so strong and so crazy that it literally crashed into this world in the person of Jesus of Nazareth – God in the flesh – and climbed up on a cross to die as a substitute for our sins. And Easter is the astoundingly good news that God plans to literally renew and restore and regenerate this world – and us along with it - because that’s what happened to Jesus. In his literal resurrection from the dead on the third day after his crucifixion, Jesus was the very first one to experience what God is going to do one day for everyone who believes in him and gives their life to him.

And we are here this morning to celebrate that good news – that Christ the Lord, Jesus the promised Messiah, has died for our sins and risen from the dead.

So, let's do celebrate. Let's stand together and if there is any way you can make room for those who are just now arriving by moving to the middle of your row that would be great.

Let's pray and then we're going to sing.

A few minutes ago, I said that Jesus was the very first to experience what God is going to do one day for everyone who believes in him and gives their life to him. As I begin this message, I want to show you why I said that because this is one of the most significant teachings of the Christian faith and it's quite often overlooked, even by those who've been Christians for a long time.

The Apostle Paul wrote ...

Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have

died. 1 Corinthians
15:20 (NLT)

Then he gives this analogy ...

*Just as death came into the world through a man, now the resurrection from the dead has begun through another man. Just as everyone dies because we all belong to Adam, everyone who belongs to Christ will be given new life. 1
Corinthians 15:21-22 (NLT)*

When Adam fell short of the mark of God's greatest intentions for his life (i.e., when he sinned), death was the eventual and inevitable result. Adam grew old and he died, which was not God's original intention for him. And because you and I are his spiritual descendants – because we have Adam's spiritual DNA, so to speak – we're all going to die, too. That's what Paul is saying

here.

But when we receive Christ and we give our lives to him, we become *his* spiritual descendants – we get Jesus’ spiritual DNA, so to speak – and that has all kinds of amazing and wonderful implications. The greatest being that *he* was the first human to be raised to life in a renewed, restored and regenerated body that will never die, that will happen to us one day as well. If we belong to him, we’re going to live forever in a real body in a real world doing real things that real human beings do. We’re not going to turn into some angelic spirit off floating on a cloud with a harp somewhere.

But, Paul says ...

There is an order to this resurrection: Christ was raised as the first of the harvest; then all who belong

to Christ will be raised when he comes back. After that the end will come, when he will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, having destroyed every ruler and authority and power. 1 Corinthians 15:23-24 (NLT)

And I'll tell you – when I think about this, it gives me such great hope for the future. Because of Christ's resurrection, in the end, God wins and we win with him. It's going to be awesome, friends, just like God intended at the very beginning when He first created this world ... only better.

As Paul wrote elsewhere:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love him. 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NLT)

Of course ... this is a *long-term* vision – something that may not happen for a while ... but what about now? What hope does Jesus rising from the dead and ascending into Heaven as the first of the great harvest give to you and me *this morning* ... *when we walk out of that door*?

That's what I want to talk to you about in this message.

The Story before the Story

And I think we'll find the answer – at least part of it – in the story of a breakfast meeting between Jesus and one of his closest followers, the Apostle Peter, which took place a few days after that first Easter Sunday. It's recorded in the Gospel of John chapter 21. But to understand that story, we need to go back and, as we did last week,

look at *the story before the story*.

And, as we get into this, I want to acknowledge the influence of Pastor Larry Osborne in what I am about to share with you. Larry has become one of my long-term mentors in both preaching and leadership and I want to give credit where credit is due.ⁱ We actually have several of his books available at our bookstore, The Well, if you're interested.

Anyway, the story before the story reveals three things we need to know about Peter.

1. First of all, he had another name.

(And this will be very important in the story to come). The man we know as "Peter" was actually called "Simon" before he was called "Peter."

In fact, in the very beginning of Jesus' ministry, the Gospel of Mark tells us that as Jesus was walking one day, beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw some guys fishing. Their names were Simon and his brother Andrew. And Jesus came up to them and said,

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will send you out to fish for people." Mark 1:17-18 (NIV)

At that point, his name was Simon.

Fast forward a couple of years – and a couple thousand people who have been touched by the ministry of Jesus – and one day Jesus asks his disciples, including Simon, "Who do people say that I am?"

And they respond with what they've heard ...

... then Jesus turns the question around.

But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"

Simon answered, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God." Matthew 16:15-16 (NIV)

Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven.

"And I tell you that you are Peter ["rock"], and on this rock I will build my church ... Matthew 16:17-18 (NIV)

And from that point on, that was Simon's name: "Peter ... the rock ... the solid one ... the one who got the big question right."

And also from that point on, Peter became

the leader of the disciples. Unfortunately, Peter's head also grew a few sizes because of all that ... which brings us to the second thing we need to know from the story before the story ...

2. One of Peter's greatest faults was his *pride*.

I'm not talking about healthy pride, like the kind you have after you do a job well, and you feel good about that. I'm talking about an underlying attitude in his life of "I'm better. I'm smarter. I'm more responsible. I'm more disciplined. I'm more talented. I'm more *everything* than everyone else." When you read the story before the story, there is a brazenness and arrogance about Peter that's sometimes stunning.

For instance, right after giving Simon his new name, Jesus pulls his disciples together again and tells them that he has to go to

Jerusalem and he's going to suffer, he's going to be beaten and he's going to be nailed to the cross. He tells them very clearly that this is going to happen, and then on the third day "I'm going to rise from the dead." Now, remember, Simon, who is now Peter, has just declared "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. There is nobody on earth who has more authority than you."

So, how does he respond to Jesus' statement? He says,

Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!"

Matthew 16:22 (NIV)

Wow! First it's "you're God" then it's "let me tell you how to run the show. I know better than you." Talk about brazen and arrogant!

By the way, this is also gives us a great illustration of how we so often miss who Jesus really is. Most people think that Jesus is all about being “nice.” You know, he’s kind of guy who would say “well, thanks Pete. I so appreciate your thoughts on the matter and I’ll take them under advisement” – even though he knows he’s still going to go up to Jerusalem. But, he just wants to be nice.

But that’s not what happens at all.

Jesus turned and said to Peter, “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me.” *Matthew 16:23 (NIV)*

Another moment of stunning pride comes right before Jesus is betrayed and handed over to the authorities who will crucify him. Jesus calls the disciples together and says,

“Here is what’s going to happen. All of you – every single one of you – is going to fall away from me. You’re just going to disband.”

But Peter says, “Not gonna’ happen. Even if everyone else falls away I will not because I’m a different breed.”

But Jesus says “not so.”

“Truly I tell you, Peter,” Jesus answered, “today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

But again, Peter argues with Jesus.

He insisted emphatically, “Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”
Mark 14:30-31 (NIV)

“They might, but I will not. My commitment to

you and my love for you is stronger than theirs.”

Ok, so what we’ve learned so far in the story before the story about Peter is that he had another name ... which was what? Simon. And we know that one of his greatest faults was what? Pride; thinking much more highly of himself that he should have. Simon ... pride ... got it?

But there’s one more thing we need to know.

3. And that is that Peter experienced an “Epic Fail.”

Now, I’m sure you know what an “epic fail” is ... but just in case you don’t, I decided to look it up in the online urban dictionary just so we’re all on the same page. Here are a couple of definitions I came across.ⁱⁱ (And, in case you’re wondering, this is supposed to

be the comic relief part of the message which we probably need because it's going to get real serious in just a few minutes).

So, comic relief time, here we go,

One definition says that ...

Epic Fail is the highest form of fail known to man. Reaching this level of fail means only one thing: *You must die, or the world itself will fail due to such an extreme level of failage.*

I'd say that's an extreme level of failage!

Here's another one:

Epic Fail is a mistake of such monumental proportions that it requires its own term in order to successfully point out the unfathomable shortcomings of an individual or group.

One more, just for fun.

Epic Fail is similar to fail, but at an even larger, more pitiful scale, sometimes so pitiful that people will not say anything due to the fail being so large that words cannot describe it.

I think you get the idea.

Anyway ... the third thing we need to know about Peter is that he had experienced an Epic Fail in his life ... and if you've ever heard the Easter story I'm sure you know what the fail is. After going on and on about what a tough guy he is and how he's so much better than the rest of the disciples and so much more committed than they are, exactly what Jesus told him would happen happens.

The Gospel of Matthew chapter 26 tells us

that as Jesus is being flogged and Peter is hanging back in the shadows, a 6'4" 240 lb Roman soldier comes to him and says ... no, actually the Bible says that a servant girl comes and says "Hey, I recognize you. You're one of his followers."

And Peter says, "You must be mistaken. I don't know the guy."

A few minutes later, another servant girl comes and says, "Aren't you one of his disciples?" And Peter says, "I swear to God I was never anywhere near him."

Another girl overhears the conversation and says, "No, I think you were. Your accent gives you away. You're from Galilee just like he is." And Peter not only swears he doesn't know Jesus, he calls down curses from Heaven on himself if he is lying.

And, at that point, the rooster crowed. Peter went out and wept bitterly. EPIC FAIL.

So that's the story before the story.

- Peter had another name ... Simon.
- One of his greatest faults was pride.
- He had experienced epic fail as a disciple of Jesus.

Now, with that in mind, let's look at the story of his breakfast meeting with Jesus just a few days after the resurrection.

Breakfast with Jesus

At this point, the Bible tells us that all of Jesus' followers had traveled north back to Galilee. As we read earlier, several of them were fishermen, so late one afternoon Peter said "I'm going out to fish." And several

others said, "Great, we'll go with you."

The Bible says that they went fishing all night and they didn't catch a thing. But early in the morning, they see the outline of a person standing on the shoreline through the fog and mist. They don't know who it is but he calls out across the water: "so, did you not catch any fish?"

"No," they answered.

"Throw your net on the right side of the boat. There you will find some."

When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then [John the Apostle] said to Peter, "It's the Lord!"

The Bible tells us that Peter jumps into the water and begins running to the shore – which is about 100 yards away – as fast as he can while the other disciples follow in the boat, towing the net full of fish. I can almost imagine Peter saying to them, “You guys take care of the fish. I’m going to see if it really is Jesus.”

When the boat finally reaches the shore, they find a fire burning with fish already cooking along with some bread.

Then ...

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord.

And, again, this is something we’ve seen several times in the appearances of Jesus after his resurrection. He was the same but

he was somehow different, because his body had been renewed, restored and regenerated. It could walk through walls and it could disappear. And, it could eat. It was different than what we have. So, they kind of didn't recognize him, but they did. And they knew it was the Lord. And then,

Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. John 21:11-13 (NIV)

So, they're having this breakfast together, and the Bible doesn't tell us what they talked about as they ate. Maybe they didn't say that much. After all, this is a bunch of guys who've been up all night fishing ... without any luck.

But when breakfast ends, one of the most intense soul-searching conversations recorded in the Bible takes place. Pay close

attention because what Jesus does in this conversation is amazing.

The Bible says,

When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?" John 21:14 (NIV)

Now, there are some really interesting things about this question, the first being that Jesus doesn't call him "Peter" – the Rock. Instead, he calls him by his former name, *Simon son of John* (Son of Jonah). It's been years since anyone has called him that. And now Jesus – the one who had changed that name in the first place – reverts back to it. That had to be stunning to Peter; like a slap in the face.

In addition, Jesus asks, "Do you love me more than these?" referring to the other disciples and reminding Peter of his boast that no matter what the other guys do, *he*

loves Jesus more than they do, so *he* will never fall away. And with this question, Jesus sticks his finger directly into Peter's greatest fault – his pride – and his greatest wound. "So, Simon, do you still think your commitment to me is better than theirs? Do you really love me more than they do?"

Wow. That's tough. Jesus isn't being very nice, is he?

One more thing to notice – Jesus asks if Peter *"truly loves"* him. It's translated that way because in the Greek, the word used for love here is *agape*, which is a way of expressing ultimate, unconditional love.

But listen to how Peter responds.

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Notice that he doesn't say *"truly love"* (or

agape, in Greek).

Instead he says "with all that's just happened, the best I can say is that 'I love you as one brother loves another [which is phileo, in Greek],' but I don't have the kind of love and commitment to you that I thought I had. It's clear to me that I don't love you more than these other guys do. I get it."

And then ...

*Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."
John 21:15 (NIV)*

"That's your assignment." Strange.

And I can imagine that the two men walk along the shoreline for a few minutes in silence; the sting of everything Jesus just said still sinking in, still weighing down on Peter.

And Jesus speaks again:

"Simon son of John, do you [agape] me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I [phileo] you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." John 21:16 (NIV)

Now, what's interesting here, if you're paying attention to this, is that Jesus lowers the bar a bit. This time he doesn't ask if Peter [agapes] him *more than the other guys do*. This time, it's a shorter question "do you truly love me?"

And Peter again says "I love you as a brother but I'm still not there on the unconditional kind of love."

And, this time, instead of saying "feed my lambs" Jesus says "your assignment is to tend my sheep" which is a *more difficult*

challenge; a greater responsibility than feeding lambs. That's important to note and we'll see why in just a minute.

Again, I imagine, the two men walk along a little further in silence. Peter's mind is reeling and his heart is throbbing.

And Jesus speaks again.

"Simon son of John, do you love me?" John 21:17 (NIV)

And this time Jesus doesn't say "truly love" (or agape). He uses the word "phileo" ... again lowering the bar that measures how much Peter really does love him.

And at that statement ...

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?"

The repeated questioning and the progressive lowering of the bar is painful to Peter. In fact, the Greek literally means he was “deeply grieved within” at what Jesus was doing.ⁱⁱⁱ

And Peter responds:

*“Lord, you know all things;
you know that I love [phileo]
you.”*

“There’s no pretending, Lord. You know that my love for you isn’t all that I claimed it to be. I can’t say I love you unconditionally. And I know you’ve asked me about this three times because I denied you three times.”

But Jesus simply says ...

*“Feed my sheep.” John
21:17 (NIV)*

“That’s your assignment” ... which is an

even greater responsibility than the two before.

Now, there's a little bit more to this conversation, which we'll look at in just a minute, but, let's step back just a bit and see what Jesus is actually doing with Peter in this dialogue. And this is important because, at some point, *this is what Jesus does with everyone who comes to Him.*

1. First, Jesus brings Peter face-to-face with his sin.

He brings him face-to-face with his sin. He doesn't let him off the hook. He doesn't pretend that what Peter did really wasn't that bad: "You know, after all, Pete, I'm back from the dead so no harm no foul. After all, you were scared for your life. I mean, who wouldn't deny someone in that situation?" He didn't say anything like that at all.

Instead, in the way he phrases his questions, Jesus turns the spotlight on Peter's greatest fault; the one thing that truly reveals that Peter, too, is a son of Adam – his pride: "you thought you were better than everyone else, Simon but you weren't. You fell short of the mark" – which, again, is the literal definition of sin.

However, at the same time he brings Peter face-to-face with his sin, Jesus does something else quite remarkable.

2. He affirms Peter's value and significance.

Each time he lowers the bar exposing Peter's true self he says "I've still got something for you to do. You're not finished. Your failure is not fatal."

And not only that ... each time, even as he

lowers the bar, Jesus *increases the level of responsibility*; going from "feed my lambs" to "take care of my sheep" to "feed my sheep." In fact, the Gospel of John tells us that as the conversation continues, Jesus makes his assignment even tougher.

He says ...

"I tell you the truth, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go."

*Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"
John 21:18 (NIV)*

And that's the story of a breakfast in which not only fish and bread were served, *hope was served* ... because I can't think of anything more hopeful for Peter, in that moment, than to hear those two words – "Follow me."

After all that had happened – after Peter's epic fail – those words mean "You're still in the game, Pete. I still believe in you. My vision for you hasn't changed. Feed my lambs, care for my sheep. Give your life not to fishing for fish but to fishing for the souls of men and women. And lead them to follow me as you do."

Jesus didn't need to sugarcoat Peter's sin and pretend it was no big deal. Instead, he overcame that sin by rising from the dead. And Peter's life was forever changed. That doesn't mean he never failed again – he did and you can read about it in Paul's letter to

the Galatians – but when he did fail, no doubt he always came back to this breakfast meeting with Jesus.

Living in Hope

And, as I said earlier, *this is what Jesus does with everyone who comes to Him*. At some point, he will bring each of us face-to-face with our sin; with our deepest weakness or our deepest fault. It might be pride or arrogance, as it was for Peter. It might be anger; it might be selfishness; it might be fear or doubt or gossip or lust or greed or lying or even sadness. Whatever it is, at some point, Jesus will put his finger on it. And he might even do it more than once. He probably will. He has in my life through circumstances and people that reveal to me that I, too, carry the spiritual DNA of Adam.

But even though it's painful, Jesus doesn't do

this to hurt us. *He does it to heal us.* See, the answer is never in sugarcoating our sin and pretending it doesn't really matter. Sin *does* matter because it destroys us.

The answer is in coming to believe and *continuing* to believe that, because Jesus died for our sin and rose from the dead ...

- We are forgiven
- We still have value and significance to Him
- We're still in the game
- We still have a purpose and a role to play for him in this world.

That's the hope we have when we walk out that door in just a few minutes.

So, in the rest of the time we have for this message, I want to look at three principles from this story that we need to apply if we

want to actually *live* in that hope when we walk out the door; these are three things Peter himself had to do.

1. First of all, face your past, then move on.

And both parts of that statement are very important.

Unfortunately, however, some of us only look at the past. We define ourselves by our epic fails. “Who am I? I am a liar, I’m a gossip, I’m a cheat, a user, abuser, a failure, a <fill-in-the-blank>.” On the other hand, some of us just want to get over it. We don’t want to face our past – or our sin – we just want look at the future and pretend the past never happened. Or, we want to shift the blame for the past to someone else, “well, if they had done this...” or “Jesus, if you had just given me a better warning of what was going to happen I probably wouldn’t have done...” It

won't work. We need to do both if we're going to live in hope.

That's why Jesus wouldn't let Peter off the hook. It's why he didn't show up and give Peter a big hug and say, "It's ok Peter. No big deal." Instead he drags him to the picture window of his greatest failure. "I never want you to forget this scar because as you remember the scar of that failure, you'll fully understand the beauty of what I'm going to do in your life, of how I will repair you and use you again in my service."

Again, remember how Jesus kept lowering the bar for Peter ... are you this? no? this? no? But he also kept raising the assignment for Peter? "Peter, you have to face your past, but you also have to move on." And history tells us that Peter did what Jesus said to do. Eventually, he was crucified upside down for being one of the key leaders of the early

church.

So, if you want to live in the power and hope that comes from Jesus' resurrection, never forget the truth of your past failures. Don't sugarcoat them. Embrace them. But also never forget that you have great value and significance to God. You're still in the game because the resurrection of Jesus means that failure *is not fatal*.

The second thing we need to do to live in hope is to ...

2. Discover our primary calling and fulfill it.

I guess you could say that this is part of moving on. If Jesus' resurrection means that we're still in the game; that we have a purpose and a role to play, then we need to figure out what that purpose and role is.

Peter had a primary calling. Remember, Jesus told him he was to be a “fisher of people, not fish” and he was going to be a shepherd of God’s flock, he was going to oversee the church. He was called to be a spiritual leader. From the day he met Jesus, the Lord said “that is what you’ve been put on this earth for.”

So, what’s your primary calling? What are you on this earth for?

Now, when most people hear that question, they tend to answer it in terms of their job or where they live or what they own. But what we learn from Peter is that his calling was not his job, or his location, or his circumstances. Turns out that Peter could “fish and feed” in all kinds of places, all kinds of jobs, and all kinds of circumstances.

The question, really, is “what one thing (or

maybe two) must I do for God's Kingdom or I will die?" I've been thinking about that a lot lately. And I've come to realize what it is. I'll tell you next Sunday, if you're here. (I'll give you a hint – it's not preaching, as much as I love doing it).

How do you figure that out? By asking Jesus "what is my primary calling?" By doing what you already know that he wants you to do; by listening to other people who look at you and say, "you are really good at this"; by listening to the Spirit speaking to your heart. Do those things and you will figure out what your primary calling is.

And understand - this can be all kinds of things independent of your job or where you live or what you have. And, also, for most people, our calling is not something we would typically label as "ministry" (like church work) though for some of us, it is.

- Maybe your calling is to raise godly children. You just want to produce Godly children - kids who love Jesus, who follow Jesus, who serve Jesus in whatever they do. That doesn't necessarily mean you need to be a stay at home mom. You might be a dad who says, "I'm going to cut back on my hours a little bit so that I can spend time with my family."
- Maybe your calling is just to be a beacon of light wherever you are. You're never going to preach a sermon, but wherever you go, people see Christ in you because you love them and listen to them.
- Maybe your calling is to make money, make lots of money, and then use some of that money to advance God's

kingdom through radical acts of generosity.

- Maybe your calling is to hang around kids and let them know through your time and love that there is a God who cares for them.

Here's the deal, if you want to live in the hope of the resurrection, you have to find your calling and follow Jesus in it.

And when you do (and this is the final principle), you have to ...

3. Worry about your own assignment, not everybody else's.

See, when I start worrying about your assignment instead of mine, I start overlooking what Jesus told me to do.

In fact, that's the final part of the breakfast

conversation between Jesus and Peter. The Bible tells us that after Jesus puts his finger on Peter's failure and affirms his value and significance to the Kingdom at the very same time; after Jesus gives him his assignment – Peter looks back over his shoulder and discovers that John has been following them, listening to their conversation (which is why we have it recorded in the gospel of John).

When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?"

Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

John 21:21-22 (NIV)

A lot of people who have come to Jesus and know their calling do the same thing. "Lord, I'll do what you told me I'm here to do, but why does he have more money? Why is her

health better? Why is his calling something that gets a lot of attention, but mine is behind the scenes (or vice versa)? Lord, I know what kind of sacrifices and hardship you're asking me to make, but what about him? Is he going to have to suffer equally? Is it going to be fair when I compare myself to her?"

And I think Jesus answers us in the same tone of voice he answered Peter. "That's none of your business. YOU follow me. I have a plan for you and even though it might be painful at times, it's good. Trust me. Follow me."

Let's pray.

Endnotes

ⁱ See Larry's message "Wildman Disciples, The Original" at www.searchablesermons.com/VideoFS.asp?SermonID=51

ⁱⁱ www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=epic%20fail

ⁱⁱⁱ elypethe

