

Big BUTS of the Bible
The “But” That Changes
Everything
April 16, 2017

Video – “Crazy Morning”
Welcome – Naomi

Worship Song – Jesus Paid It All
Reading – Rick
Video – He’s Still Risen
Worship Song – “Christ Is Risen”

Announcements – Video
Feature Song – “Locked Away” / Offering

If I showed you my flaws
If I couldn’t be strong
Tell me honestly
Would you still love me the same?ⁱ

Of all the questions that ever drift through our
minds that has to be one of the scariest.

- If you knew the *real* “me” ... if you could see the “me” that’s less-than-perfect, less-than-honorable, less-than-whatever ... the “me” I don’t want anyone else to see – would you still love me, anyway?
- Or if the day came when I could not measure up to your expectations or even to my own ... if I was unable to keep my commitments to you or to follow through on my promises – would you still love me the same?

The reason that question is so scary is that every single one of us knows that *there will come a time* (and maybe multiple times and maybe that time is right now) ...

- There will come a time when the flawed and ugly part of ourselves that we’re hiding and protecting becomes visible.
- And there will come a time when the weak and fearful part of us fails everyone,

including ourselves.

And when that time does come, will happen then?

It's a frightening thought, that fear of discovery and rejection. It runs deep within all of us, so deep that most of the time we try not to think about it.

So, imagine my surprise when, one day several months ago, I found myself thinking about it in the most unlikely of places – *Impact Fitness*, the gym where I work out two or three times a week.

Like most gyms and fitness centers, *Impact* has a soundtrack that runs non-stop. Most of the music is pretty intense and hard-driving because we're not there to socialize; we're there to pump some iron and feel the burn and the music almost always matches that intention.

But, one day that song the band just did – *Locked Away* by R. City and Adam Levine – started playing. And since it's kind of a smooth sound and

the melody is kind of singable, I started listening. And the more I did, the more I thought, “Wow! That song is talking about some pretty deep stuff! I think it might actually be the perfect song for Easter Sunday!”

And when shared that with our service programming team, they immediately agreed with me.

Well, not exactly. But, since I’m the pastor and I typically get to decide what comes right before the message, they went along with it. 😊

And I’m glad they did because ...

**What we celebrate on this Easter Sunday –
The Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus –
provides the greatest “yes” from the
Greatest Being there is to the greatest
question concerning our greatest fear.**

If I showed you my flaws

If I couldn’t be strong

Tell me honestly

Would you still love me the same?ⁱⁱ

The Cross and the Resurrection assure us that the all-knowing, all-seeing eternal God who made us and knows us better than we know ourselves says “yes, I *will* love you; yes I *do* love you the same.”

The Big BUT

And to explain why I say that and why you should believe that, I need to talk to you final big “BUT” in our series “Big BUTS of the Bible.”

And if today is your first time with us, I should probably explain that, in this series, we’ve been focusing *not* on the overgrown derrieres of biblical characters but on several specific statements, specific promises, specific warnings in the Scriptures where a very small word – “but” – appears in that statement, promise or warning and can make a huge difference in our lives if we take it seriously and apply it.

We've talked about:

- The “but” that lasts forever ... which is that most people invest all their financial resources in making themselves comfortable here in this life only to see it come to nothing in the end when they die. BUT, Jesus said, there is another option which is to invest in the life to come by being generous to the people and causes God loves.
- The “but” that no one wants (because it's hard to accept) ... which is that God can deliver us *from* the fiery furnace of trials and tribulations BUT sometimes He delivers us while we're *in* the furnace; meaning that sometimes we have to go through hard stuff but He is with us and gives us strength.
- The “but” you need to lose ... which Jesus said are all the lame excuses we make that

keep us from experiencing and enjoying what God wants for us both now and in the life to come.

- And, finally, there's the "but" that's hard to believe ... which is that life and people and even the demonic forces of darkness may intend to do us harm BUT, for those who belong to Jesus, God uses even those things to bring about good *for us, in us and through us.*

And if you weren't here and would like to know more about those particular "buts," I encourage you to check out the media section of our app, website or subscribe to our weekly podcast.

And now, for the final "but" of this series ... which I suspect will not be too much of a surprise given that it's Easter Sunday ...

When they had carried out all that was written about Him, they took

*Him down from the cross and laid
Him in a tomb.*

... which is exactly what you would expect people to do for a friend or family member who had been executed by crucifixion. And you would expect that to be the end of the story.

BUT ... it's not the end of *this* story. It's not the end of Jesus of Nazareth and it's not the end of the movement He started (called "the church") which continues to this day.

Yes, they took Him down from the cross and, yes, they laid him in a tomb.

BUT ...

*God raised Him from the dead.
Acts 13:29-30 (NIV)*

And this, friends, is "the BUT that changes everything."

Why Believe?

And I want to talk to you about why that's true but, before I do, I realize this is a pretty bold claim to accept – especially for someone who isn't sure that any of it really happened! So, I want to talk to you about that, briefly, and then we'll examine how and why it changes everything.

What evidence is there that Jesus of Nazareth really did rise from the dead and that this all isn't just a made-up story? Why should we even consider believing it?

Hundreds of books have been written for and against that claim over the years, so there is no way I can do this question justice in the time that we have this morning. Instead, what I want to do is to share with you several reasons why I personally believe it to be true.

Several years ago, I read a book by Tim Keller called *The Reason for God* which

made a very good point:

“It is not enough to simply believe Jesus did not rise from the dead. You must then come up with a historically feasible alternative explanation ... some other plausible account for how things began.”

Specifically, you must answer questions like these:

1. Given that they executed Jesus in the most shameful, horrific and public way possible, why did Christians and Christianity not only survive *but thrive* in such a hostile environment?

One author observes ...

“Never in so short a time has any other religious faith or for that matter any other set of ideas religious, political or otherwise *without the aid of physical force* achieved so commanding a position in such an important society as that of the Roman

world.

“It is clear that at the very beginning of Christianity there must have occurred a tremendous burst of energy – virtually unparalleled in history – without which the future course of the religion is inexplicable.”

If not the real and literal resurrection of Jesus, what was that burst of energy? That’s the question.

Here’s another really good question.

2. How did a movement based on the proclamation “He is risen” not only survive but thrive in the unique philosophical environment of that time?

Because we live in the 21st Century where we’ve figured out so much stuff about how the world works, we tend to think that the people back then were not only dumb and lacking intelligence, they were also *really superstitious* and would believe

pretty much anything you told them. “Oh, so you say that Jesus rose from the dead? No big deal.”

But that’s not true because, in that period of time, *people would have hesitated to believe in a literal physical resurrection as much as we do* for two huge reasons.

First of all, in the pagan Greek mindset (which was the underlying culture of the Roman world), there was a core belief that “the spiritual” was what was good, but anything material, including the human body, was evil. Therefore, true freedom and bliss was when the soul escaped the prison of the body at death.

Once achieving that state, no soul would ever want to go back into a body – as Jesus supposedly did. The very idea would have been met with great resistance because it would have been seen as undesirable. Yet thousands upon thousands of pagans came to believe this is what happened to Him.

Secondly, in Jewish theology, while there was an openness to the general idea of a physical resurrection, it wasn't something they believed would happen to just one person, as Christians said it had to Jesus. In their theology, resurrection would happen at the end of time, to everyone, followed by Judgment Day, followed by the beginning of what the Bible calls "the age to come."

So, to them, the idea that *one guy* had been raised from the dead on the third day following his death would have been incredibly bizarre.

Put it all together and it simply means that for followers of Jesus to go around preaching "He is risen" about a resurrected Jesus was sheer folly. It was the absolute worst strategy you could think of to start a new religion in that place and time among those people ... unless, of course, it was the truth.

And if it wasn't the truth, what other explanation is there for *that* being the central proclamation?

Here's another interesting question ...

3. What caused thousands of first-century Jews to suddenly start worshipping a human being (Jesus of Nazareth)?

And this is an important question because the single most unique characteristic of Jewish theology was the belief that there were not *many* gods (which is what the Greeks and Romans and every other culture for thousands of years, had believed), but the belief that there was *only one* God who created everything.

So, the idea that any of these people would *casually* get together and start a new religion which not only worshipped Yahweh but also a man from Nazareth (or anywhere) is beyond hard to fathom. In fact, it would be *blasphemy*.

The only way that thousands of Jews would

become worshippers of Jesus is if something dramatic took place that caused them to radically re-interpret – *literally overnight* – their core doctrine of “only one God” to mean that the man, Jesus of Nazareth, was identical to the “one Lord”; that the “One Lord” had put on flesh, so to speak, and come to dwell among us.

What kind of dramatic occurrence could cause that kind of a theological shift to take place so rapidly? Other than seeing Jesus alive in the flesh, I’m not sure what else could have that kind of effect.

Anyway, those are a few of the reasons that I personally believe the Resurrection story is more than just a story; that it’s a literal historical event (like George Washington becoming the first President of the United States).

If you would like to know other reasons why

it makes sense to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus ...

... you might check out Lee Strobel's book, *The Case for Christ* (which is what the current movie by the same name is based on) or you might look at Tim Keller's book, *The Reason for God*.

Big Changes

Of course, none of my reasons or any book I might recommend can provide absolute proof, so I realize that reasonable people might still doubt and even reject the claim that Jesus died, was buried and then, *literally* – not spiritually or figuratively or sentimentally or any other “ly” – rose from the dead in a renewed, restored and regenerated body that will exist forever.

However, supposing that it *is* true ... supposing that it *did* happen ... how does that change *anything* (to say nothing of changing *everything*)?

For one thing, as I said before, it removes any doubt concerning God's answer of "yes" to the question that expresses our greatest fear: *if you knew me fully, as I truly am, would you still love me?*

The Cross and the Resurrection remove any doubt about that.

In fact, there *is* no way *other* than the Cross and the Resurrection for God to answer the question.

Think about this: how can a Being who exists outside of time and physical space (in other words, a Being who is by definition "eternal" and "spirit") – how can a Being like that demonstrate love to beings like you and me who are finite and material?

And, by the way – and I'll just throw this out there for free – I wouldn't immediately dismiss the idea of an all-knowing "Eternal Spirit Being" as some kind of ancient fairytale. The cosmology of the "Big Bang" – the measurable scientific reality that

our universe once did not exist and then suddenly began to exist (i.e., the Big Bang) – means that it is entirely possible that such a Being does exist.ⁱⁱⁱ

And if that Being *does* exist and that Being is responsible in some way for everything else that exists (including you and me), then the only way that Eternal Spirit Being can truly express love to finite material beings is for that Being also to become finite and material – to become *human* – and somehow demonstrate it with “skin on.”

Otherwise, all we have to go on are pious platitudes such as “God loves you, you just have to trust and feel it in your heart” ... which sounds really good on the surface.

However ...

- What if my heart is broken?
- What if, by personality type, my heart just isn't that sensitive?
- What if *my* heart tells me something

different than what *your* heart tells you?

- What if my heart is deceiving me – which so often happens?

When it comes to facing my deepest fear of discovery and rejection over just how flawed and weak I truly am (especially by an all-knowing, all-seeing God), if all I have to go on is my heart and what it perceives and feels, then I'm in big trouble. If that's all I have, then my best strategy and my only hope is to try and ignore the question: *would you, would anyone, would God, really love me the same?*

I need something (and I think you do, too) a lot more tangible and concrete, something measurable and observable that says, “Yes, it really is true.”

Fortunately, the Bible tells us that this Being who exists *outside* of time and space – the Eternal Spirit who is God – became a finite material Being *inside* of time and space in the person we call Jesus of

Nazareth (which is yet another reason why Christianity is unlike any other major religion or spiritual pathway).

As the Apostle Paul once wrote:

Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth ... For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ. Colossians 1:15-16, 19a (NLT)

So, we have the Eternal Spirit Being – God – with “skin on” in the person of Jesus, which is amazing.

But what He does in that skin is even more amazing.

Through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross. Colossians 1:19-20

(NLT)

... which brings us back to something very tangible and concrete; something measurable and observable; the events of Good Friday and Easter Sunday – the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus.

But how does that demonstrate love?

Paul explains it like this:

Most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good.

In other words, you and I probably wouldn't choose to give our lives to save a neighbor who happens to be a good guy or gal.

But if we knew for certain that they were going to become ...

- The scientist who discovers the cure for cancer
- Or the peacemaker who finally negotiates an end to war in the Middle East
- Or the economist who solves poverty in third world countries

... we might perhaps be willing to make that trade: our life for theirs and every good thing they would accomplish.

BUT, Paul continues ... BUT, he says, “God doesn’t make that kind of a trade – a good thing for a better thing. That’s not what Jesus did.”

Instead, he says ...

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. Romans 5:7-8 (NLT)

- All of those things that you and I call our “flaws” and “weaknesses” ...

- All of our “less-thans” – the less-than-honorable, less-than-perfect ways we think and act ...
- All of the commitments we fail to keep and promises we break ...

All of those things are ways that we fall short of the glory for which God created us. And the Bible has a word for that: *sin* – which literally means “missing the mark” ... which literally means that you and I are sinners.

So, when Christ comes to die for us and pay the penalty that all sinners deserve (which is death and separation from God), God isn’t making the trade of a good thing for a better thing.

Instead, He’s doing the unthinkable. He’s making the trade of *the best thing* (His Son and the perfect life he lived) for pretty much *the worst thing* (me and you and the sinful life we have lived, are living and will continue to live). It’s unthinkable ... unless of course, *He loves us* in spite of our flaws

and weaknesses and all our less-thans and failed commitments and broken promises.

... which is why I said earlier that the Cross and the Resurrection of Jesus remove all doubt as to God's answer to the question:

If I showed you my flaws
If I couldn't be strong
Tell me honestly
Would you still love me the same?

Actually, that's not totally right. What I just explained is how *the Cross and Jesus' death in our place* removes all doubt that God loves us in spite of our sin.

Here's how the resurrection accomplishes that same end.

Again, Paul writes ...

We were by nature deserving of

wrath.

Oooh, that's a little scary, isn't it? But it's actually just another way of saying that sin has a righteous penalty – a righteous punishment – associated with it.

In other words, it wouldn't be right for God to just pretend that our sins don't exist, just as it wouldn't be right for a human judge to pretend that a theft or a murder or some other crime wasn't committed. By nature, by definition, a criminal deserves the wrath of human justice when they break human laws and sinners deserve the wrath of Divine Justice when they break Divine Laws.

That's why Paul says as sinners we were “by nature” deserving of wrath. It's the simply the way that justice works.

BUT, he says, that's not what we get.

Instead, he writes ...

But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. Ephesians 2:3-5 (NIV)

Whoa, wait a minute! I thought God made Jesus alive. After all, that's the "but" that changes everything: *they laid Jesus in a tomb BUT God raised him from the dead.*

But here Paul is saying that not only was Jesus made alive again, we also – when we come to the point where we believe in Him and receive Him and what He did for us – we also are made alive again. We are born again, so to speak. We are born from above. We are born of the Spirit.

And it happens, Paul says ... God does that for us, Paul says, because of His great love for us. Because of His love, God wants us to have more than just forgiveness of sin; more than just a pardon from

the wrath we deserve. He wants us to have a whole new life, just like Jesus.

- They took Him down from the cross and laid Him in a tomb BUT God raised him from the dead.
- We were by nature deserving of wrath BUT because of his great love for us, God made us alive with Christ.

And that changes everything ... which is why the Bible says, among other things, that believers in Jesus ...

- Have the Holy Spirit living in us, so we have God's power and presence with us at all times.
- Never become "unborn" of the Spirit, so we cannot lose our salvation.
- Are called to experience a life of purpose

right now – we get to be part of sharing the Good News and building God’s Kingdom in whatever way fits our giftedness and season of life

- Become part of God’s forever family – the church. We become brothers and sisters to believers throughout the centuries and all over the world.
- Go to be with God when we die, instead of receiving the punishment that sin deserves.
- Will be raised up to a new life in the flesh when Jesus returns to earth.

And all of that and more is in addition to the greatest “yes” from the Greatest Being there is to the greatest question concerning our greatest fear. We are loved in spite of ourselves.

Getting Personal

The cross and the resurrection really does change everything ... and it all can be yours and mine *by grace* which means that God did it and God offers it to us while we are still sinners, which is the exact opposite of how most people think God works. And it's the exact opposite of what most religions teach.

Most people think – and most religions teach – that it is the upright and good and godly people who God loves. It's *that* kind of person who deserves to receive God's mercy. If God's Son is going to die to save anyone, *that's* the kind of person who it ought to be ... which, sadly, is why so many people believe that you need to clean up your act and try *not* to be a sinner before God will love and accept you.

But that's not right. That's not true.

Instead, the truth is that God, knowing all of your flaws; knowing your propensity to disobey what

you clearly know you should and should not do ... and knowing that you are so often not strong enough to say 'no' to even the slightest temptations ... God loves you anyway. And God He has done something about your sin even before you knew it was wrong; even before you were born, obviously!

Jesus died and rose again and that changes everything. And all you need to be part of it is to receive Him.

And some of you this morning are for the very first time in your life understanding that. The light has come on in your heart and mind, you are convinced and convicted by what I am saying. And you are ready to receive Him. In just a minute, I'm going to help you do that.

But some of you are not yet convinced. You're interested. You're intrigued. But you're not ready to fully say "yes, I believe in Jesus."

Do you know what Jesus most often said to people like that – seekers? He said “Follow Me.”

“Take my yoke upon you and learn from me. See how I live. Watch what I do. Listen to what I say. Test it out for yourself.”

How do you do that in real life? Well, I think you just start showing up - here or at any church that teaches the good news about Jesus. Then you listen. Then you try out what you hear. And then maybe you make up your own mind.

“Follow me” is what Jesus is saying to you this morning.

But some of you here this morning are *beyond convinced* about Jesus. You’re no longer a seeker and it’s been months and years since the light dawned for you. It’s been months and years since you believed in and received Him as your savior and accepted his grace. You’re a believer.

Do you know what Jesus most often said to

believers? “Obey Me.”

“If you love Me,” he would say, “you will keep my commandments. You’ll do what I say. And to not earn any favors or get into my good graces – you already are. You’ll do it because I love you and you love me back. You’re not compelled by fear or any other false mentality but simply by my love for you.”

And for some of us sitting here this morning, Jesus has been telling us “obey in this; stop doing this; start doing that.” And you know what it is but you’re saying “no.” Jesus says, “come on, obey me.” And I think this morning is an opportunity for you to hear about what God has done for you. This amazing love that Jesus has and what it means. You need to say “yes” to those things (or no to some of those things).

Ok, let’s pray...

- For those who are believers and need to

start obeying

- For those who are seekers and still searching for answers.
- For those for whom the light has dawned.

Feature Song – Death Was Arrested

CLOSING COMMENTS

Next Series

Project update

Endnotes

i From the R. City, Adam Levine song *Locked Away*

ii From the R. City, Adam Levine song *Locked Away*

iii See William Lane Craig's illustration of the Cosmological Argument here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CulBuMCLg0>