

The Rev. Billy Cerveny:

So anyway, I was reminded as we read this passage about this book that I once read by one of my favorite authors. There's a guy by the name of John Krakauer. Are you familiar with John Krakauer? He wrote *Under the Banner of Heaven*. He wrote *Into Thin Air*. And he wrote this one book called *Into the Wild*. And *Into the Wild* is the story of this young guy by the name of Chris McCandless. And Chris McCandless came from this sort of well-off family. He was really smart. He went to Emory University. He went away to study. And he was, you know, a high honor student. But he got really enamored with the writings of people like Tolstoy and these people that sort of gazed into the dark abyss of life, a lot of the Russian poets, Dostoevsky types, that gazed into the dark abyss of life and found things meaningless.

And so, McCandless, as he made this commitment that when he was going to leave, he was going to forsake everything.

So, what he did is when he graduated from college, the next day they said that they found he gave all of his possessions away. He gave all of his money away. They found a pile of burnt money that he had had left over in his pocket. He burned all his money, and he hit the road. And he took off and they found his car. This is them recreating the story, John Krakow recreating the story. They found his car like miles down the road. He had run out of gas. He left it and he started hitchhiking. This began a journey for this guy. For two years, he went and wandered across the country.

And he would lean into the kindness of others or that he would live off the land or he would, you know, find different ways he'd, you know, wander through the Mexico and the Pacific Northwest and into the deserts of Utah and Nevada. And he eventually found himself in Alaska. In April of 1992, he hiked into the woods of Alaska. He's a total purist. All he had was a very naive. All he had was a 10-pound bag of rice and a book on flowers and plants that you could eat.

And at first, he was fine. He walked miles and miles into there, and he found an old, abandoned school bus that these hunters used as a refuge. And he was living there, and it was great at first until the weather came in. When the

weather came in, the water rose around the area he had chosen to call home, and he couldn't get out. And he started getting hungrier and hungrier and he began to eat these plants that he found. But he wasn't sure exactly what they were and they, as I said, as they recreated it, it turned out these plants weren't exactly what he thought they were. His rice ran out. There was nothing for him to eat. It became weaker and weaker. And this school bus, it was this picture of adventure, became this tragic waiting room.

And Chris McCandless sat and he waited and he waited, biding his time, just white knuckling it because what he needed was out there.

It was beyond the walls of where he could reach and he just had to wait until someone was going to rescue him and take him to what he needed.

Well, it was probably about 10 months later, 11 months later that they found his body.

And he was in the school bus, and he had succumbed eventually to the elements and starvation. The most heartbreaking thing about the story that I found was this and that everyone finds about it when they read it is this. Is that where he camped, he was less than a mile away from a fully stocked ranger station. It wasn't blocked by water or the elements. He just didn't know it was there. He couldn't find it. He couldn't get to it. Everything he needed would have been at his fingertips. It was right there. But because he was unaware of it, it was as good as it not being there.

And everyone from his family to the people to John Krakar, the people that recreated this story,

they found the most tragic piece was that he died with what he needed that was already in reach. I love this book. I love this book because I totally relate to this guy.

I probably read this a couple, a few times.

I relate to him because I know that longing inside of me that I want to feel something real, something transcendent, especially when I was that guy's

age. I know what it meant to be like, I want to get on the road and, you know, just, you know, face in the wind and experience something real.

And like Chris McAnlis, I want to go on this spiritual journey for something real that's exciting at first. And I remember caving into God and caving into Jesus and being like, okay, I'm going to go, I'm with you. And I go on the spiritual journey. If anybody has been a Christian for any season of life, you know how sweet it is in the beginning. But like any journey, much like Chris McAnlis, guess where we find ourselves? We always find ourselves in the wilderness at some point.

At some point, we find ourselves in the wilderness.

That wilderness can be a relational one where within our friends or maybe your marriage is coming apart or whatever it may be. It could be a spiritual wilderness to where those prayers that used to land like hammer blows that you would just feel God right in front of you, that God just seems like a fantasy in your life,

a memory of what he once was to you, or maybe it's something emotional that you just feel out of control or you feel anxious or you're depressed and you're just like, Lord, where are you? Is this all there is? You're in this emotional place and it feels like the weather comes up and you can't get out of it.

What I need is out there.

It's beyond the reach of what I can get to.

And what was once this beautiful, spacious place isn't so beautiful anymore, it just feels like a waiting room.

Our life starts to feel like a waiting room, and we think about the promises of God. We think about Jesus. We hear all this talk. We just read about like the resurrection.

And I think to myself, you know, one day I can get to I'm going to die and I'm going to, you know, I'll fly away and I'll get to experience resurrection power.

One day where the grand cord resolves in my life and I feel like in the meantime, I'm just in that giant waiting room. Can you relate to that at all?

I think you can because I can.

When do we start expecting so little out of the Christian life?

When do we start expecting the resurrection, the power of the resurrection to be something out there?

And in the meanwhile, I'm just going to gnaw on some plants I find until I get with an unveiled face to see Jesus, which is of course, glorious and awesome.

See, what's so sad about that, it's so much like that McCandless story I told you, is that the things that we desire, and we need the most, it's not just out there. It's with arms reached of us, not perfectly, but much like him who had all those supplies there that he just didn't know it. He didn't know how to access. He was ignorant to it. He couldn't get to it, and he starved to death. Sometimes we become so spiritually anemic because we don't take advantage of those things that are right there.

Those things that are our fingertips and we have to understand it, and we have to begin to digest it because if we don't understand it, if we don't digest it, if we don't live in the reality of it, guess what? It's as good as it not being there because we're not taking advantage of it.

So, what we want to do today is I want to lean into this a little bit. We just read that passage in Luke 20 and Jesus, this is a master class of Jesus talking about the resurrection. And what he's saying is it's not just some reality that's out there that one day we'll experience it.

He's talking about the present realities of the resurrection now and he's saying, understanding this, it will redefine your reality.

And if you understand the resurrection power now, it will also redeem our stories.

So how does it redefine our realities? Let's take this one at a time. So, Jesus is having this conversation and he's having a conversation with the religious leaders of the time. Now, one of the things that you think about when you think about the temple and back in those days here, the Pharisees and scribes and Sadducees and the Essenes and all these just different class of Jewish leadership back in the day. We think of them as this one mass of people. That is not true. So, because they were divided into all these camps that bitterly disagreed with each other. You had the scribes and the Pharisees. These were the people that were prescribed to the entirety of the Old Testament from Genesis to Isaiah and on down the line. They were keeping the letter of the law. They believed in the power of God and his angels and all these things. And you had these other people on the other side called the Sadducees. And the Sadducees, you heard this name before, the Sadducees were the elite, wealthy ruling class of the time. They were the religious blue bloods back then. And the things about them, they differed a lot from the Pharisees. They did not accept the full body of the Old Testament. They only believed in the Pentateuch, which is the first five books, Penta 5, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. That was their scripture and that's where they stopped. But what was interesting about them, they didn't believe in angels. The Sadducees didn't believe in spirits. And the biggest thing about it is they didn't believe in an afterlife. That's why the Sadducees were sad, you see.

You'll remember it.

The Sadducees, they were sad. So, they approached Jesus, all right, every, but the one thing they had in common with the Pharisees is they had a common enemy, and it was Jesus. They didn't like him any more than the Pharisees liked him. So, they began to rally, and they all began to kind of aim their theological weapons at him. So, they approached Jesus and they began talking to him with this ridiculous hypothetical scenario. They say, okay, Jesus, you know the Old Testament, you know the Moses and what Moses said. And Moses said that if you, if there's a woman who's married to a man

and the man dies and they don't have any children, so his name won't be erased and so this woman won't be cut adrift, the brother of that man will be her kinsmen redeemer. He will marry her and take her into his home and then they will have children, and the name will continue on down the line. But imagine this, there's this one-woman Jesus wanted to tell you about and yeah, well, she had a poor husband and then she had another husband that died and then his brother married her and then he died and then his brother and then he died and then his other brother married him. This goes on seven times. I don't know what's wrong with this woman. She's like the Black Widow, but she has seven, all seven brothers go through her and then they all die. Still no children and then the woman dies and what Jesus says to them, or the Sadducees say to Jesus, they said, whose wife is she going to be in the resurrection?

And what Jesus says in this moment is brilliant.

He uses the Torah that they subscribe to that we all do to redefine their reality and Jesus; I'm taking this kind of in reverse order the way he spoke to them. Jesus turns to me, he says, remember in Exodus 3, Moses comes across this burning bush and Moses, this voice calls to him and Moses says, who are you?

And the voice from the bush, it was Yahweh. It was the creator God and Yahweh says in verse 37 in our passage, I am the Lord, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.

And what Jesus says to the Sadducees, he says, don't miss what he's saying here.

Don't miss what the burning bush is saying to Moses in this moment. God says, I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Those are guys who died a long time before then, before that moment. The Greek in that he's using it, it's in the present tense. And what Jesus is pointing out, he's saying, he is not a God of the dead, but a God of the living.

The way God is talking about Abraham, Isaac and Joseph is not like they're dead. He's talking about that, like they are alive in him. That the power of the

resurrection in that moment, they are, it is happening now. That the resurrection power as God speaks to them, Jesus's point is saying that it's a present tense reality for these, for God and for you.

So, you read the Gospels and what you see is you see Jesus turning the volume knob slowly up on that idea. This whole idea of resurrection, Jesus pushes it again and again. When you see Jesus do a miracle in scripture, when he comes, when he raises a woman from the dead or the little girl from the dead, or he heals the hemorrhaging woman, or when he heals a blind man, or he tells a person to pick up his mat and walk, what's happening in that moment? Is it Jesus just doing a magic trick? No.

Jesus, yes, he's doing a sign because he wants people to understand who he is, but he's also, he's not just doing a sign, he is planting a sign that's pointing somewhere. What Jesus is doing in that moment is that he is, Jesus is tearing the barrier between heaven and earth. He is cracking the engine block of history, and he is grabbing resurrection power, the realities of the new heavens and the earth, and he's applying them in front of people right now. And he's saying, this resurrection power, do you see it's here? It's happening. It's not something that just waits when the water goes down and you get to go across.

It's a reality now. The kingdom of God is what? It's at hand. The kingdom, this future kingdom, he's drawing this forward and infecting the world with the eternal realities of God that sin tried to destroy.

The wholeness, the goodness, the peace, the healing, and the patience.

And it keeps going and it gets even better. Jesus isn't just teaching about resurrection.

He's not saying to them, hey, stick with me, kid, and I'm going to show you how to get resurrected. What does he say in John 11? He says, I am the resurrection. Not I dispense resurrection. Not I'll tell you how to find resurrection. Not that I'll carve you off a piece of the resurrection apple and let you take a bite. He's saying, I am the resurrection. I am the life.

Why does that matter? Why does that matter? Because it's foreshadowing. These breadcrumbs he drops, they get bigger and bigger and bigger and they become so obvious and confusing until once he dies and he steps from the grave.

What that means is this. If you are in Christ, if you are in Christ, if you know Jesus, the Scripture says that you're a new thing and what happens in that new thing? You become one with him. You become one with him. And when his Holy Spirit was poured out, heaven broke through. We've talked about this the last few weeks. Remember the passage you read in Joel about God pouring out his Spirit? Heaven broke through. John 6, whoever believes in me, present tense, has eternal life. It's a current reality. It's not something we get later. The kingdom of God is at hand.

And this resurrection, this truth of the resurrection, it redefines our reality. How?

What this means is we are not sitting in some divine waiting room.

When I go through the hard seasons of my life, I am not sitting in the school bus, lost in the woods, waiting for heaven and the resurrection, waiting for my number to be called so I can go and finally to get the thing I need.

I'm not trapped there. I'm not in the woods waiting for a rescue party. I am on the front lines of new creation.

I am on the front lines of re-creation that God is calling me and he's saying to each of you, he's saying to me,

"I am invited; you are invited to participate in this re-creation."

Man, that sounds like a lot of pressure, doesn't it? Yeah, that's not the point.

The same Spirit that was once hovering over the waters in Genesis 1. You read it in the Hebrew, it sounds like a bird, like a mother bird's wings hovering over the waters in creation. It is hovering over you. That same Spirit, it's hovering in you. It's at work in you. It's at work around you. It's before you. It's

behind you. It goes with you. It waits for you and is already there when you arrive. That is God's Spirit. And we're called the love and to create and to serve and to care for people. We are cutting with the grain of the Spirit. And in those moments, we're not just being nice.

We're not just being nice. In the same way Jesus wasn't doing a magic trick when he was doing miracles, he was bringing the realities of the new heavens and the new earth to bear in history. We are doing the same thing. The Spirit is at work.

The same power that rose Jesus from the dead is at work in you. And it might not look as dramatic, but I assure you this, you are building the kingdom of God in those moments. In those moments, you are doing something that is eternal. You're laying a brick. You're building a wall. I don't know what it looks like on the other side of the curtain, but I know what he promises, that what we do is dense with implications. It is re-creation at work as God's Spirit moves through us. His eternal kingdom is being built. To steal the phrase of Tim Keller, it is not you building heaven. It is heaven building through you. How cool is that? How cool is that?

Doesn't that just like cut to the heart of the mundacity of our life?

The things that we think are just like, "Oh, time to make the donuts." No, you're not making the donuts.

Some of you are old enough to know I'm talking about.

You're not. It's not a rinse and repeat world. You're partnering in new creation.

You ever wonder if your life matters? If you're of any consequence, when you reflect back and you're like, "Man, I should have turned left years ago. Instead, I turned right." And who cares? What does it matter?

When we step into the larger story of Jesus and what he is doing, who you are and what you are doing is of eternal significance.

So, the resurrection, it redefines our reality, but it also redeems our stories.

I'll tell you what I mean. Going back to the Sadducees, they're trying to corner Jesus.

And they give him this crazy convoluted riddle about this woman and marriage and all this stuff. And you know what? The punchline is that they don't care about marriage. They don't care. They're literally just trying to get him in a figure four and just kind of lord it over him. But Jesus, he's not scared of an argument. And what he does, they tell the story about the poor woman and the seven husbands, and they said, "Whose wife will she be in the resurrection?" And Jesus says, he replies, "In the resurrection," verse 35, it says, "Neither marry nor are given in marriage, for they cannot die anymore, because they are equal to angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection." Sons of the resurrection, sons of God.

Which when you read the Old Testament, when you hear about the sons of God, this is a place of esteem. And God's almost like his holy cabinet, his council, his divine council.

Being sons of God. And what Jesus is saying there, he says, "Whose husband is this going to be... Which husband is she going to have?" And Jesus is saying this, "The premise of your question is wrong."

It's not that I don't want to answer your question, but the question is wrong, because it's spoken out of such ignorance.

So, you think the resurrection is this continuation of how things are, that the world to come is simply going to be an extension, more of the same. But you could not be more wrong.

What we see in the resurrection, it's not a continuation of creation, it is the fulfillment of creation.

So, when marriage, or work, or beauty, or art, or community, as we all know these things, they're all shadows of these things to come. As C.S. Lewis says that art and marriage, these are fingers pointing to God. That there's

something greater that will be the fulfillment of what these things are foreshadowings of.

So, wait, there's no marriage?

And what Jesus is saying in this moment, he says, "Yes, marriage," Ephesians 5, you remember this? He says, "Marriage is a mystery. It's a picture of what Christ and the church...

And then when we go to glory, we will finally, we are called the bride of Christ. We are ushered into a new day. It sounds sad. Because, oh man, I love being married. But the promise of what he's saying here is that we won't experience less intimacy. We will experience more.

We will experience intimacy the way that it was intended. In the resurrection, it is not the absence of a union. It is the consummation of our union, but it's going to happen with Jesus.

And the point Jesus is making is not really about marriage. What Jesus is talking about here is he's saying that the resurrection and all the things of this world and all the things of this life, they will be absorbed.

And they will be transformed. And they will be brought into their right relationship with the world. And what that means is the painful stories that you have, the broken places that you have in your life, those things that you can't even kind of bring up. Those things will be absorbed into God's story and redeemed in a way that we cannot fully understand.

I'll give you an example of what I mean.

I didn't get married until I was 36.

But one of the blessings I had during all my years of singleness is I have a brother, and I have a sister, and they had a bunch of children. So, I had nieces and nephews. Let me tell you, there's no greater joy than being like the cool uncle who could come into town and just hang out with them and sugar them up and then give them back. But one of the best things about being the fun

uncle was that I used to buy them the best Christmas presents. And the key to buying the best Christmas presents as the preferred uncle is this. You always buy something that's slightly beyond their years and something that is a little bit dangerous. I don't mean like end your life dangerous, but maybe lose a finger or two dangerous, right? Something that definitely requires parental guidance. So, one year I found the perfect gift and I was like, I could not be more excited for it. And I'll take you on the same ride I took them on. Christmas morning times we go out, and my nephews are there, and I give them this box and they're like, oh, go Billy, go, awesome. They go, they tear open this box, and they reach in and they pull out a big sack of potatoes.

The sack of potatoes.

And they're like, thanks? And I'm like, yeah, you know, potatoes are good. Just, you know, you like them. We can, we'll, you know, we'll cook some tonight. And they're like, man, the couple of friends go by and I'm like, hey, I got another thing for you. And I gave them this other, I gave them this other box, and they opened it up. And it was a box that was filled with like 10 cans of white rain aerosol hairspray. You know, the Loretta Lynn commercials used to do the white rain commercials, you know, the white rain. And they're like, what? I'm like, gotta look good, guys.

And they were so confused. Just like you are right now.

Time went by and towards the end of the thing, I brought out this box. It was six feet long. And they opened it inside. This was a six-foot-long piece of PVC pipe that had a, that was four inches wide. It was round. And at the bottom was a huge cylinder with a giant red button at the bottom and a broomstick. It was a potato cannon.

And what you did is you would take a potato, and you would push it down into the hole of this thing. And you would take the broomstick, and you would push the chunk of potato that created a seal down the bottom of this six-foot cylinder. And you would unscrew the back, spray white rain hairspray in there, close it up. And that little button on the side was a barbecue grill starter. And it would light that hairspray off. And we were like, let's go out back and try it. We put it in there. I had no idea. I thought, oh, I'd shoot potato

pieces. Kaboom! I mean, it was a weapon. It was the greatest moment of my life. Mostly because when I looked at their faces, the look of impish destructive glee on those young boys' faces.

Now, what happened in that moment?

When they got those potatoes, it was terrible.

It was the worst part of their day.

It was the worst part of their story.

And then I made it worse. It's the next thing I gave them; I gave them this hairspray. And that was the worst.

But all of a sudden when I gave them, but the potato cannon,

those things were absorbed into a larger story that they couldn't see.

And all of a sudden it changed everything. And in fact, the worst parts of their story became the best parts of their story.

It became the best part. Getting those potatoes, it became the best part. You remember when you did that? Yeah, and then we didn't know. And then all of a sudden, whoa.

It redeems it. It absorbs it.

And not only that, those things that once were bad, they became essential to the joy of the story. And to leave that part out would be leaving a part out that would make the story even more joyful.

See, every other religion that we can see in this world, here's the story it tells. They all have a story of an afterlife.

We've talked about this before.

But the story of their afterlife is, you're gonna live here, you live good enough, you're gonna go to the other side, and guess what? You're gonna experience a gift of eternity that's gonna be so great, it's gonna eclipse the tragedy of that life. You're gonna be just so happy with the good things you're gonna get, it's gonna eclipse this, or we're gonna create such a distance that will just fade off into the memory. That is not Christianity.

What Christianity says is, all the broken pieces of your story, every aspect of it, there are no scraps.

I am a God of recreation. That part of your story, those potatoes, that hairspray, those aspects of your story that you would have never chosen for yourself,

God is gonna absorb it into the larger story. And he's gonna redeem those things. And I don't pretend to know what that looks like because, and I know some of you have things in your story that are horrific. And I am sorry.

But I know my Jesus, and I know the eternal promise of the resurrection is that not only will those things be absorbed in his story, they will be an intricate part of the joy that we experience in God.

I don't know what it looks like, but I know that the worst parts of the story become essential to the glory and the joy. There are no scraps.

Romans 8, what does it say? That God works all things together for the good of those who love him. He's not saying that all things are good,

but that's our God.

He can take the bad things and the things that we can't even begin to understand, and he redeems them and he turns them into good things.

All these things will resolve.

All right, let me tie this together.

So, there's three types of people in this room.

You've either been through some

and you're not there anymore, or you're going through something now,

or you're about to go through something.

But none of us get out of this unscathed.

Because the resurrection redefines our reality, those difficult times, those broken places are not evidence of God's absence.

In fact, those difficult times, those broken places, those are the reason that Jesus came to plant resurrection life right in the middle of that.

Because resurrection only makes sense against the backdrop of death.

It only makes sense against the backdrop of death.

And the resurrection redefines our reality while I still can't see what God is doing, you need to know you're not by yourself in the woods.

You're not trapped in some school bus just waiting for the water to go down, and then one day you can journey on to glory.

The resurrection life is real, he is moving in you in ways that you don't even know how to ask for, to bring about things you don't even know enough to desire.

That is what God is doing.

I heard someone once say that he is giving you the things that you would pray for right now if you could see what he sees.

And this redefines our reality, but it redeems our story, because the truth of it is that we all have some area in our story that we need to see resolved.

And you know, I pray for you, I pray that that place in your life that you need resolved and you need healed, I pray that happens.

But I'm gonna tell you the truth because I'm not here to just make you feel good. It might not.

We all have struggles,

and the promise of the gospel is not that he's gonna fix everything right now.

We might have that thing that doesn't resolve, but the power of the resurrection

is that the joy that God offers us, we can have in the middle of our trials, not just on the other side of them.

The joy that God offers us happens in the crater, not just when we climb out of it and build a new house.

I'm not saying happiness.

Happiness is a chocolate chip cookie. It doesn't last; it was never meant to last. It's fleeting. I'm talking about joy, something sturdy.

And the reason we can have that is that in this, we can have encounters with Jesus in our pain.

Now, some of you are hearing this, we can have a count, when you're hearing this or you hear me reading the scripture or talking about resurrected life now that you don't have to wait. Some of you, you can feel that stern in your heart now. It's burning in you. You're like, yes, I need that, thank you, Jesus.

Some of you can feel that.

Some of you feel that when we read the word, some of you feel that when you kneel at the communion rail. Some of you feel that when we sing these

worship songs. Some of us, the point is this, that is resurrection power. That is the Holy Spirit moving,

resonating and moving in your heart.

Some of us feel this when we feel the joy of the Holy Spirit when we begin to share our lives with other people.

I don't know, but I know this, he doesn't leave us alone. And my ability to experience the joy of God and the resurrection power doesn't mean that I need to get out of the woods first. It's right there, it's right there. It's within my grasp. And the question I need to ask is, am I willing to grab it? Am I willing to slow my roll,

breathe in the realities of God?

Say, here I am, and let that resurrection power begin to reveal its life through all those things that we just talked right now.

Amen.