

He Is Risen

by Harrison Conley

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Did you bring a Bible with you today? Good. If you've got a Bible, go ahead and pull it out and find with me, please, the book of Luke. Luke 24. We're going to get there in just a moment. Luke 24. Over the past few years, it's been my great honor and my great privilege to be able to stand here on the stage on Resurrection Sunday and open the Word of God with you. Truth be told, there's no greater message that I'd rather preach than Jesus and the resurrection.

Especially when you consider the New Testament Church and the origins of our faith, go back to the Book of Acts in particular. This is what instructed their faith. This is what the New Testament Church preached. It's what they lived by. For a lot of them, this is what they died for. The message that Jesus died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. That He was buried, but that on the third day, God, the Father, through the power of the Holy Spirit, raised Him back to life.

Friends, this is the gospel, and it's the greatest news the world has ever heard. This morning, if it's all right with you, I want to preach to you about Jesus. There is this pressure at times that you feel when you're speaking on Easter to bring something brand new and revelatory. If it's all right with you this morning, I think the resurrection says enough in itself. I'm going to stay close to Jesus, the cross, and the empty tomb. We're going to put our attention where it belongs.

The exclamation, "Christ is risen!" is the glue that holds our faith together. Before we read, I want to try something. This might be fun to do together. It's something that I think will bring a sense of continuity in the body of Christ. As a matter of fact, it's something that will be practiced today throughout churches around the globe. It's something that actually hearkens all the way back to the first century and the New Testament believers. Oftentimes, when these New Testament believers would meet together, when they would gather, they would have to do it in secret because of the severe persecution that they were under.

They would greet each other when they met. Or maybe a believer was out doing their errands in the public market or in the public sphere, and they would catch eyes with another believer, and they would share this greeting of sorts. One believer would say to the other, "Christ is risen." The other believer would look back and, without skipping a beat, say, "He is risen, indeed." I wonder if maybe we could, together, do that. I'm going to say to you, "Church, Christ is risen," and then you're going to say, "He is risen, indeed." Can we try that?

Hey, church, Christ is risen! "He is risen indeed" Oh, that feels good. We need to do it one more time. Ready? Church, Christ is risen! "He is risen indeed" Yes, yes, yes, He is. Luke 24. I've just got a few minutes with you today, and I want to read these verses. Luke 24:1-6 NIV. It says,

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. (It was two angels.) ⁵ In their fright the women bowed

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down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen!”

Can we just acknowledge for a moment that these are the three most significant words in all of human history? There never has been, nor will there ever be, a proclamation quite like it. These three words, “He has risen.” They’re the battle cry, and they’re the heart and soul of each and every believer. Like I said this morning, I’ve just got a few minutes together with you. My assignment is to point you to this risen Savior.

I want to point you to the empty tomb. I think most of us have been in church long enough or grew up in a church setting to the point where we understand the story of Easter. We understand the resurrection. We just read the verses. We know the characters that are at play. We know the order of events. I just wondered, even if you grew up in church, even if you attend church regularly, when is the last time you just stopped and sat and pondered what the resurrection of Jesus really means for you as a believer?

What I want to do is I want to just simply use the word risen as an acrostic, R-I-S-E-N. I want to share a few thoughts with you. Five things to consider about the resurrection of Jesus, and what it means for you, and what it means for me. If you’re taking notes this morning, it should be pretty easy. You’ll know when I’m about to finish. R-I-S-E-N. Here’s the first one, R. It stands for redefinition. Redefinition. The resurrection means redefinition.

As we examine the resurrection and the story of Easter, we’re met face to face with the fact that God’s power can turn anything around and use it for His ultimate glory. Look no further than the cross. Look no further than the grave. These things, when we stare at them, remind us that God is the God who redeems, He’s the God who transforms, and He is the God who redefines.

This is what I mean. Look at the cross. If you will even go back a little bit before the cross to the whipping and the scouring that Jesus endured before He went to the cross. These things personify torture and pain. They personify suffering and brokenness. Now, in light of the resurrection, in light of the power of God, these things have been redefined. They’ve become monikers and monuments to things like peace, wholeness, healing, and pardon.

What was once meant as a symbol of grotesque shame, the cross has now become a beautiful beacon of salvation. So much so most of you today are wearing a cross on a necklace or as an earring. Some of you have a cross tattoo on your arm. We don’t think of it as a grotesque thing of shame, but rather, we look at it, and we’re reminded of God’s amazing mercy and His grace. God is the God who redefines.

Think about the grave. For us as humans, the grave has always been the symbol of death, confusion, and final defeat. Now, in light of Christ and His resurrection, for us as believers, the grave has lost its hold. The grave has lost its power. Death is no longer a foe. Death has become a friend. When we think about the empty tomb, we are filled with hope and not despair. We have hope because we know that we have ultimate victory in Christ Jesus.

When we consider these things, we rejoice because we know that if God can bring redefinition to things like the cross and the grave, it means that even on our worst days, it means that even in our most desperate of moments, it means that even when I have screwed up my life beyond repair, God, in fact, can rectify, redeem, and ultimately redefine those things for His glory.

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This is what the resurrection means. That God redeems my life from destruction. He redefines my pain. He redefines my tragedy into something beautiful for His glory. The resurrection doesn't just mean redefinition. The resurrection is also irrefutable. That's that second letter, I, irrefutable. The resurrection is not just some made-up fairytale used to brainwash Christians. The resurrection is not some elaborate hoax that the disciples pulled on the masses to trick them into supporting some dead religious ethic code. On the contrary, the resurrection of Jesus is a matter of irrefutable fact. It's inarguable. It's indisputable. It's indubitable. That's a fun word.

Look that one up. Now, I realize that most of us think the Bible is the only source for the resurrection, but that's not the case. There are actually volumes of practical, historical writings that give credence to Jesus' rising from the dead. I'm telling you, the evidence is out there. If you will study it, it will change you.

You can look at historical secular accounts. For example, there's a man named Josephus who lived at the time of Christ. He was a secular Jewish historian. He writes about the resurrection. There's a Roman governor named Pontius Pilate. Familiar with him? In his private letters, he writes about the resurrection of Jesus. Even beyond the secular historical writings, obviously, the Bible speaks very deeply of the resurrection.

Let me give you three biblical facts, three biblical witnesses that point to the resurrection. Here's the first witness: the witness of the empty tomb. You see, all other religious saviors are still in their tombs. You can go visit the graveside of Muhammad, you can visit the graveside of Buddha, and they're still there. Jesus, He's different. He just borrowed His tomb for a couple of days. He's not there anymore. He is risen.

Think about it like this: the empty tomb speaks loudly. The women, we read about it a moment ago, come to the tomb that Easter morning, and they see that the stone has been rolled away. They peek inside, and they see that Jesus is not there. Immediately, they run, and they get the disciples. The disciples run to the tomb, and they go inside, and they realize He's not there. It wasn't just the women, and it wasn't just the disciples. This takes place in Jerusalem at Passover. As word begins to spread out that the grave is empty, all the city comes to see. At Passover, the population of Jerusalem would've swelled to estimate ten times what it normally was.

Historians estimate that at that time in the first century, Jerusalem, on average, had about 100,000 people. At Passover, because it was a pilgrimage ceremony where people would come in to celebrate, that population was swelled to almost a million people. When news got out that the tomb was empty, all of those people came to witness and to walk in and see that the Savior was not there. Then, they went home all over the known world, and they began to spread the message.

The empty tomb speaks loudly, but it's not just the women who saw the empty tomb. It's not just the disciples. It's not just the city of Jerusalem. I, too, bear witness. Personally, I have stood outside the tomb. I have walked in the tomb, and I can tell you with my own two eyes, I've seen it. He's not there. He's not there. As a matter of fact, we have a picture of it. That's me standing there outside the tomb, supporting UCLA. Sorry to all my USC friends. He's not there. There's an old saying that goes like this, "That the stone was rolled away, not so Jesus could get out. It was rolled away so the rest of us could get in. So that we could get in and testify to the fact that the tomb is empty."

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Here's the second biblical witness to the resurrection. It's eyewitness accounts. Say what you will, make whatever excuse you want about the tomb being empty, but you cannot dispute people's eyewitness testimonies. Especially when you consider it's not just one testimony. It's not just two testimonies. It's not just the word of Mary, who was at the tomb. It's not just the word of the 11 disciples who ran and saw the tomb.

As a matter of fact, you go to 1 Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul mentions five distinct different times that the risen Jesus appeared to people. Paul goes so far as to even name the names of the people who saw him. In other words, Paul's going, "Look, whether you like me or not, go talk to these people. They're still alive. They will tell you what they saw."

In one of the times that Paul writes about, Jesus appeared to a group of 500 people. In Acts 1, we're told that for 40 days after the resurrection, Jesus continually met with and talked with people before He ultimately ascended into heaven in front of His disciples. Now, there's this theory that's been thrown out there that maybe the people that saw Jesus all had the same hallucination. Or that maybe they were all in it together, and it was this elaborate hoax.

I'm telling you, with the number of people who had an eyewitness account of seeing the risen Lord, it's impossible that they all had the same hallucination. It's impossible that many people kept the same story straight. It is not a hoax. He is alive. Here's the third witness to the resurrection. It's the change in the disciples. If Jesus had not been raised from the dead, how do you explain how these disciples went from being cowardly and fickle to becoming a group of brave, bold, and outspoken leaders?

Think about it. Think about the night Jesus is arrested. The night before, He would go to the cross. His disciples are there with Him. The soldiers come and arrest Jesus. The Bible says that the disciples ran. They were scattered like sheep without a shepherd. Think about Peter, bold Peter, who promised Jesus, "I'm going to stand by You. Even if it leads to my death, I'm going to stand beside You. I'll never deny You."

The night Jesus is arrested, three separate times, Peter denied ever knowing Jesus. Yet after the resurrection and after seeing Jesus with their own eyes, each of these disciples went on to turn the world upside down. Many of these disciples laid down their lives as martyrs for their faith. They laid down their lives because of their conviction and their teaching of Jesus and the resurrection. How does that change happen? It happens because Jesus is alive.

These are three fundamental lines of evidence. Three witnesses, when woven together, demand a verdict. These things prove irrefutably that Jesus is risen. Let's move on to the next letter, letter S. This one gets me fired up. This one stands for the same power. Because Jesus is risen, now His supernatural life becomes our life. I love the way the Apostle Paul would write about it in Romans 8. If you've got your Bible, you can turn there, Romans 8:10-11 NKJV. Paul says it like this,

¹⁰ And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. ¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you...

Pause. If you've put your faith in Christ, His finished work on the cross, and in His resurrection, if you call Jesus Lord and Savior, you are filled with His Holy Spirit. Romans 5:5 says that God pours out His love into your heart by the Holy Spirit. That's how God applies salvation to your life. He fills you with His Holy Spirit. Paul says, Romans 8:11 NKJV

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¹¹ But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life...

I love that word, *life*. It's powerful. It literally means "resurrection power." The same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will also give resurrection power to your mortal bodies through His Spirit, who dwells in you. That's amazing! The same power that raised Jesus from the dead, the same Holy Spirit that wielded that power, now lives in us and brings to us the same supernatural life and resurrection power in our mortal bodies. Let me say it like this. The resurrection isn't just a celebration. I'm thrilled that we're all here together today celebrating the resurrection, but that's not all that it is. The resurrection is not just a celebration. It's an experience. It's a powerful and a personal experience.

This is why the Apostle Paul would cry out in Philippians 3, "That I may know Him." Him being the resurrected Christ. "That I may know Him and know and experience the power of His resurrection." What does that mean? It means that when Easter becomes more to you than just a story, that when you actually put all of your faith in Jesus and what He's done for us, when you do that, the supernatural power of God gets released in your life. The same Holy Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, He comes to live in you and dwell in you. His power is so radically supernatural that it changes you totally and completely from the inside out. You still look the same on the outside, but on the inside, you're something completely new. It's so supernatural; Jesus said it's like being born again.

The Apostle Paul would say it like this, "that if you are in Christ, you become a new creation." Where, spiritually speaking, all the old is gone. Everything becomes brand new. The Bible tells us that before the resurrection, we were actually dead in our sins, and in our trespasses. We were all slaves to sin. We were slaves to the desires of our flesh. Now, because of the resurrection and because the supernatural life of God lives in us, we're no longer slaves to sin.

Our status has been changed. We move from death to life. You have to understand, this is how supernatural the gospel is. It's not about making a bad person into a good person. No. When the resurrection power of God comes crashing into your life, it's not about a makeover. It's about a takeover. He takes a dead person, and He brings them back to life. That's what the power of God does in us.

We've been made alive together in Christ Jesus. We're now more than conquerors through Him that loves us. Meaning we no longer have to be dominated by our sinful desires and our old ways of thinking and our old ways of doing. If we're honest in church this morning, which is usually a good policy to have, I think most of us know a little something about being stuck and feeling stuck in old, sinful patterns. Where we know better, but we act out anyway, and we fall prey to familiar sins.

Perhaps some of us are even haunted by the thought. Like, I know this isn't what my life is supposed to look like. Where we look in the mirror like, "Oh man, I thought it was going to be different because my life just feels like two steps forward and then another step back." How often do we feel powerless because we've tried to change? We've tried to do the right thing. We've tried to become more disciplined in our lives, yet we find ourselves falling back into that same sin over and over.

I don't know about you, but I found this to be the case in my life. When I try to change in and of my own power, it rarely seems to work. It's like I need a higher power. That's the beauty of the

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resurrection. It declares you don't have to do this alone. You don't have to rely on your own strength because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead now lives in us. When we rely on His power and not our own power, what it does is it actually allows us to close the gap between the person we are and the person we know God is calling us to be.

It's like when Jesus told Paul, "And My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in your weakness." Paul said, "Therefore, most gladly, I'd rather boast in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore, I take pleasure in reproaches, needs, persecutions, and distresses for Christ's sake. For when I'm weak, then I'm strong." That's the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. It comes to live and dwell in each and every one of us.

Then quickly, the final two, E. It stands for eternal life. Eternal life. Because of the resurrection, I have a sure and steadfast hope that one day, when I have to lay down this physical body in death, it's not going to be the end. Rather, when I lay this body down, I'm going to step into eternal life. Like we sang this morning, "Ain't no grave going to hold me down." I can hear my English teacher cringing as I use the word "ain't." "Ain't no grave going to hold my body down." That just as Christ was raised, I too will be raised and walk in the newness of life for all of eternity.

First Corinthians 15 speaks in detail about this. The Bible says that because Christ is risen, there's a day coming soon and very soon when we're going to shake off mortality, and we're going to put on immortality. The Bible says we're going to get a new body. A glorified body like unto Christ. A body that's going to be impervious to sickness, disease, sin, death, and decay. We're going to be made like Him. We're going to be whole.

The Bible says that in that day, He's going to wipe every tear from our eyes. Every injustice is going to be made right. That we will be made whole, our brokenness will be restored. Please understand, as believers, the earth is not our home. We're just sojourners. We're just passing through. The Bible says that this life is like a vapor. It's here, and then it's gone. There's a day coming when we will see Him. In the meantime, our souls long for that city that is our home, that city that has a foundation whose builder and maker is God. We're not citizens of the earth. We are citizens of a different kingdom. The great writer and thinker CS Lewis said it like this, "If I find in myself desires that nothing on the earth can satisfy, then I have to conclude that I was not made for here."

Listen, there's a day coming soon and very soon where we will see King Jesus. Right now, the Bible says, it's like looking through a glass darkly. Things are a little bit blurry. We don't understand the full weight of glory. When we lay aside mortality, and we put on immortality, and we step into eternal life, it's there, and then we'll see the full weight of what Jesus has done for us. When we see Him, and we see the eyes of love through which He looks at us, we will get down on our knees, and we will throw our crowns at His feet. We will cry out with the hosts of heaven, "Holy, holy, holy, holy is the Lamb of God."

The resurrection means eternal life. Because Jesus got up out of the grave, so too will you and I. Then, finally, and this is where I close, the letter N stands for now. Now. Now that you've heard the message of the resurrection, what will you do with it? Now that you've heard the message about our amazing Savior, what will you do with it? Now that you've heard the message of how much He loves you and how He gave Himself for you, what will you do with it?

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Now that you've heard that salvation is available, how will you respond? Here's the beauty of the Gospel. Here's the beauty of the message that we've heard today, is that you don't have to earn this salvation. Jesus has already done it for you. The Bible says that the wages of sin is death. Jesus became that for us. He died for us. He died as us, so that the claims of God's eternal justice could be satisfied. So that you and I could be redeemed back to God. Then, on the third day, God, the Father raised Jesus back to life. Now that you've heard the message, what are you going to do with it?

Pastor Bayless and I were talking in between services. He reminded me of this story, and it so beautifully sums up the gospel. I want to just quickly share it with you. The story goes like this: there was a little boy. He was fascinated with boats. He bought a little kit, and he put together this little boat that he wanted to sail on the pond near his house.

He took painstaking efforts to get everything perfect. He got his favorite color, red. Painted it this cherry red. He hand-stitched all the sails. He got everything together. Worked days and days to get this thing ready. Then he went out into the pond to see if he could get it to float. He put it on the water, and to his amazement, it floated perfectly. It was ready to set sail, but then this wind kicked up. The wind filled the sails of this little boat and began to blow it out far beyond this little boy's reach, and it went, and it went.

Eventually, he lost sight of it, and he got so discouraged. He went home. He had lost his little boat. A couple of days later, he was walking down the street, and there was a pawn shop. He looked in the window, and there was his boat sitting in the window. He recognized it because it was a special color, red, that he had painted it. He went in, and he talked to the owner. He said, "Hey, that's my boat." The owner said, "I'm sorry, somebody sold it to me. If you want it, you can buy it from me." The sad little boy went home. He got all of his savings and broke open his piggy bank. He went back, and he purchased that boat. As he was walking away from the shop, he held it tightly in his hands. He looked at that boat, and he said, "I love you." He said, "Now, you're mine twice. First, because I made you, but secondly, now, because I bought you."

Your Heavenly Father not only made you, but He purchased you back. Not with the blood of bulls or goats, but with the precious blood of His Son. He bankrupted the vaults of heaven to redeem you and to redeem me. You are His, twice, because He made you and because He purchased you. Again, now that you've heard the message, what will you do with it?

You have to please understand what you're signing up for. If you receive this message, which I hope that you do, you have to understand that this is a total and complete submission to God. Society doesn't like that idea. Society will tell you, "No, you can serve God, but you stay on the throne of your life, and you do what you want, and you apply the things that you want, and you become this spiritual person." That is not what the Bible says. You see, people in society today want forgiveness without repentance. They want salvation without submission. It doesn't work that way.

Jesus said, "I'm the way, I'm the truth, I'm the life. No one gets to the Father. No one can have salvation without Me." What this is, it's a total and complete surrender to Him. Jesus said, "Come all that want to come but pick up your cross. Come and die. Die to your way of living. Die to your way of thinking and doing, and pick up My life. Pick up My way of thinking, My way of doing. Submit yourself to Me and to My Word."

It's radical, but the world needs radical believers now. The world needs a radical church that's sold out in total submission to the call of God. What will you do with it? This message is for you.

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The Gospel is for you. Salvation, it's for you. You have to receive it. You have to come to this conclusion that I've got nothing to offer God, and I've got everything to receive.

If that's you today, I want to pray for you. If you want to make Jesus the Lord of your life, I want to pray for you. As we pray, I believe that the Holy Spirit will come and make His home in you. That same power that raised Jesus from the dead will change your status and change you from being dead in sin to alive in Christ. Eternal life becomes your reality. If you wouldn't mind just all across this place, would you bow your heads and close your eyes? Just for a moment, consider what's been spoken today. For those of you who have been listening to me, maybe some of you have even heard another voice, another voice whispering to you.

That's the voice of the Holy Spirit. Maybe His voice has been doing a couple of things. Maybe it's been convicting you of sin. I can't do that. Only He can. Maybe He's been speaking to your heart, letting you know that there's a chasm that currently exists between you and God, and you are troubled about the state of your soul. The Holy Spirit does that. He convicts people of sin. I believe the Holy Spirit's also been convincing you. Convincing you that although the sin is great, that although the chasm is there, there's a Savior. There's a way, there's a bridge, and His name is Jesus.

If you're in this place today and you go, "Yes, yes, pastor, that's me. I want to make Jesus the Lord of my life. I want to submit to Him. I need Him to forgive me. I need Him to make me new on the inside. I want His Holy Spirit to live in me. If that's you, I'm going to count to three in just a moment. When I do, I'm going to ask you to lift a hand. Just an outward way of saying, "yes," inwardly. "I'm in. I'm all in this. I want Jesus to be the Lord of my life." After you lift a hand, I'm going to acknowledge it. We're going to celebrate you, and then we're going to pray.

If that's you all across this place when I get to three, if you want to make Jesus the Lord of your life, if you're making that declaration today that says, "I'm His, I'm submitting my life before Him." When I get to three, would you lift a hand? 1, 2, 3. All across this place, Oh, my goodness, so many hands! More than I can count. Bless You, Lord. Bless You, Lord.

You can go ahead and put those hands down. Many of you who are lifting a hand, the rest of us in here, we sat in a seat just like you did at one point, maybe even we lifted a hand. We've all been exactly where you are right now, and we are thrilled for you. We are excited for you because this is the greatest decision you could ever make in just a moment.

Something supernatural is going to happen. You're going to get made into a new creation. You're going to be born again. You're going to come into the kingdom of God. Here's what happens. You've got to pray. The Bible says that if you will confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and if you will believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, if you will do that, put heart and mouth together, that's when salvation occurs.

Again, this is not a pray, and I'm good. This is a pray, and then I actively pursue God. I pursue what He has for me and for my life. What I'm going to get you to do is pray. I'm going to get you to start forming words on your own lips: words of dedication, words of sincerity, words that say,

Oh, Lord, would You rescue me? I'm lost in my sin. I'm dead in my sin. I can't do this on my own. Jesus, I believe You died in my place on the cross. I believe God raised You back to life. Would You fill me with Your Holy Spirit? Would You make me new on the inside? Help me to submit to You, to Your ways, and to Your Word.

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If you'll pray a prayer like that, if you'll form words like that and mean them with your heart, God will meet you right where you sit, and He'll apply salvation to your life. Go ahead and begin to lift up your own prayer. Lift up your own prayer with your own words. The reason I'm getting you to pray, instead of me leading you in a prayer, is so that you know from the outset, you don't need me. You don't need a preacher. You don't need a priest to get to God. You have direct access. The Holy Spirit of Jesus comes to live and dwell in you.

God, upon every life, upon every person that's crying out to You right now, I thank You for Your Word. I thank You for its truth. That at this moment, You are pouring Your love into their heart by the Holy Spirit. You're applying salvation to their life. Father, I pray You'd make Yourself real and known to each and every one of them and that they would follow You all the days of their life. In Jesus' name, Amen. Amen. Amen.

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