

“HOW EASTER CHANGES EVERYTHING!”

1 Corinthians 15

INTRODUCTION

1. Near the end of the 1st Persian Gulf War, a woman named, Ruth Dillow, was asked to come to her boss’s office in a small town in Kansas. Two uniformed Army officers were waiting for her.

They informed her that two hours earlier, just before a cease fire was declared in the war, her youngest son, PFC Clayton Carpenter, had been killed by a cluster bomb.

Ruth said, *“I just fell apart. ‘He was dead,’ are the only words I remember them saying.”*

She went on to say, *“I can’t begin to describe my grief and shock. It was almost more than I could bear; the loss was just too great.”*

For three days, she couldn’t stop crying. She was angry, but the anger was only surpassed by the emptiness in her heart. Even though her family and friends tried to comfort her, it just didn’t help.

Her friends sent her sympathy cards. At the town’s general store, a wooden plaque paid tribute to Clayton with a red rose and some black ribbons.

But after three days, she received a telephone call. She wasn’t prepared for the voice she heard, *“Hi, Mom. This is Clayton.”*

She froze, *“Are you sure this is Clayton? You’ve been declared dead.”*

Her son was pleading with her on the phone now, *“Come on, please believe me, this is me.”* He told her that he was calling from a hospital in Saudi Arabia and that he’d been lightly wounded... but he wasn’t dead.

His mother was so confused, she asked, *“What did I call you when you were little?”*

For a moment he panicked and couldn’t remember. Then it came to him, *“You called me ‘the little garbage disposal.’”*

In just a few moments, the whole town seemed to know about the mistake. The next morning, the town had an impromptu parade with hundreds of people.

Ruth Dillow told a reporter, *“I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels, because my son whom I thought was dead, was really alive. I’m sure none of you can begin to understand how I felt.”*

2. She’s probably right. We might not understand how Ruth Dillow felt, but when you read the pages of the Bible, you discover the story of some people who did know how she felt and even more!

The early followers of Jesus watched their best friend die on a cross 2,000 years ago. They heard Him say, *“It is finished. Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.”* They were witnesses as the Roman soldiers ran through the

battery of tests which proved Jesus was dead. Some of them wrapped His lifeless body in grave clothes and laid it in a tomb. They saw Roman soldiers seal the tomb with a giant stone. All their hopes were buried when Jesus died.

Unlike Clayton Carpenter-Jesus was dead!

For three days they grieved. No question about what happened. But when some women made their way to His tomb on that first Easter Sunday, the Bible says that the stone had been rolled away. The account tells us that an angel appeared to them and said, *"You're looking for Jesus among the dead. He is not here. He is risen, just as He said."*

2. Folks, that's the story Christians all around the world are celebrating this weekend. Frankly, this is my favorite time of the year. Why is it such a big deal? With all the problems in the world, is it really relevant? Does the story make any difference today?

The Bible teaches it makes all the difference! The Bible teaches that when I believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it changes everything in my life.

Before I go any further, I think it's important to clarify what we're talking about. I'm not just suggesting the ideas of Jesus are live today. –even though that's true

Eg. A generation ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered his famous, "I Have a Dream Speech," in Washington, D.C. where he promoted equality for all human beings regardless of race. Dr. King was tragically assassinated,

but in many ways the dream he proclaimed still lives today. Love your enemies...your neighbor as yourself.

Jesus taught great ideas, but I'm not suggesting that only the ideas of Jesus still live today. Nor am I suggesting Jesus experienced some kind of resuscitation after they thought He died. Some suggest that Jesus merely fainted on the cross because of the pain and blood loss He'd experienced. They propose that He never really died, but that He just revived in the cool tomb.

Eg. When my wife was teaching 4-year olds, she would bring baby chicks into the classroom for the children. One day, one of the little chicks was dropped by a child. The children thought that little chick had died.

Roxanne picked up that little chick and placed it in a trash bag to be taken to the dumpster.

A few hours later, as the children were dismissed, they walked past the custodian's room and that trash bag. They heard: *"Peep. Peep. Peep."* They opened the trash bag and found that little chick had been resuscitated. Apparently, it had just been knocked out. The kids thought the little chick had been resurrected from the dead! "Mrs. Fetterhoff-it's a resurrection!"

That's NOT what the Bible says happened to Jesus. When we talk about the resurrection, we're talking about a dramatic act where God the Father arrested the process of decay and decomposition in the body of the Lord Jesus and rescued Him from death itself. The Bible says His body was changed, and He appeared alive to hundreds of

people following His death. That's something that never happened before and has never happened since.

Maybe that story sounds familiar, but you're still asking, "What difference does this make?" Maybe you think a lot like the following people...

Today, we want to focus for a few moments on why this story is so important. If you have a copy of the Bible, turn to 1 Corinthians 15. I want to share with you three reasons why the story of "Easter Changes Everything" in my life.

First, when I choose to believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ...

1. **IT GUARANTEES PARDON FOR ALL THE SIN OF MY PAST**

Do you know that all of us have one thing in common? It doesn't make any difference how old we are, what job we have, how much money we have in the bank or how healthy we are. Do you know what we all have in common? We've all said, thought or done something that makes us feel ashamed. Not just one or two...many things!

It's true for me...and it's true for you.

Eg. The great American author, Mark Twain, once said,

"Man is the only animal that blushes, and the only animal that needs to."

We're not only ashamed of the things we've done; we're ashamed of the things we haven't done... the things we've left out. The Bible calls this, "sin." Romans 3:23

Do you understand that when Jesus came to this earth He offered forgiveness to every one of us?

- Forgiveness is just one of God's best gifts to humanity.

The Gospels tell us about an encounter that Jesus had with a paralyzed man. He looked at that paralyzed man and said,

"Son, your sins are forgiven" (Mark 2:5).

What? Imagine that! Imagine me looking at you and saying, *"I forgive all of your sins. I forgive you for the skeletons in your closet!"*

You'd look at me like I was crazy. And you should! You'd be tempted to say, *"Who do you think you are, God?!"* And do you know what? You'd be right!

That's exactly the reaction of people when they heard Jesus tell this paralyzed man that he was forgiven. They said,

"Who can forgive sins but God alone?" (Luke 5:21b).

So Jesus looked at them and said,

"That you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins... He said to the paralyzed man,

'I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home' (Luke 5:24).

In other words, the miracles of Jesus validate His claims as God! Only God can forgive all of my sin! Only God can forgive the skeletons in your closet!

To prove once and for all that He can pardon all of our sins, Jesus performed the greatest miracle of all when He came out of the tomb alive!

Eg. Imagine I'm driving on I-71 toward Columbus. Suppose I'm keeping up with the traffic and doing 80 miles an hour.

Suddenly, I see the lights of a patrol car in my rearview mirror.

The officer pulls me over and says, *"May I see your license and registration please?"*

I say, *"Was I doing something wrong?"*

He says, *"Mr. Fetterhoff, I'm going to have to give you a ticket because you were doing 15 miles an hour over the speed limit."*

That's **justice!**

Now, suppose I'm driving on I-71 keeping up with the traffic. A police officer pulls me over a second time and says, *"License and registration please!"*

I say, *"Was I doing something wrong?"*

He looks at me and says, *"Mr. Fetterhoff, I see you have "Reverend" in front of your name, I know it's Easter weekend, so slow down. People will wait for you to get to church. I'll give you a warning this time."*

That's **mercy!**

I'm driving on I-71 doing 80 miles an hour. I see the lights of a patrol car in my rearview mirror. He pulls me over, asks for my license and registration. I ask him, *"Was I doing something wrong?"*

He looks at me and says, *"Mr. Fetterhoff, I clocked you doing 80 miles an hour. But I see you have a tail light out. You know, I want you to slow down a little bit so I'll give you a warning, and by the way, here's \$100 to get your tail light fixed. Be careful and enjoy the weekend!"*

That's grace! Grace is the basis of God's forgiveness. When I will fully break the law of God and He offers forgiveness-that's grace.

When I deserve justice because of all of my sin, Jesus offers me His grace and His forgiveness.

Paul says it like this to the Corinthians:

"If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Corinthians 15:17).

Jesus made the most audacious claim any man could ever make. He claimed the power to forgive sin. How do we

know if He was correct or not? There is only one answer: He came back to life.

When He came back to life, He proved that His death on the cross satisfied the justice of a perfect God. Now He is able to forgive all those who believe in who He is and what He's done. The resurrection validates the death of Jesus Christ! When I chose to believe in the resurrection it guarantees pardon for the sin of my past.

When I chose to believe in the resurrection of Jesus...

2. **IT ALSO GUARANTEES POWER OVER THE STRUGGLES OF MY PRESENT**

Eg. Recently, I came across an article called, "How You Can Tell When It's Going To Be A Rotten Day." Here's what the author wrote:

"You're going to have a bad day when..."

- The birds singing outside your window are buzzards.
- You put both contact lens in the same eye.
- Your boss tells you not to bother to take your coat off.
- Your income tax check bounces.
- Your car horn sticks as you follow a group of Hell's Angels on the highway.

The truth about life is... it's tough. We experience one challenge after another, one disappointment after another, one heartache after another, one struggle after another. One temptation after another.

It's true. At least once every 2 weeks, someone gets a chest cold, or the roof springs a leak, or the car throws a rod, or an ingrown toenail becomes infected, or a business crisis develops. Loved ones die and catastrophic diseases appear and life slowly grinds to a conclusion. This is the nature of human experience, whether we like it or not." (optional)

Eg. One old guy was shaving in the morning, looked into the mirror and thought, "Man, I look old; but with a good night's sleep, maybe I'll look better tomorrow." (optional)

Then, he heard a still, small voice say, "Don't count on it. This is the best it's ever going to get!"

Do you ever feel like that? Life can get discouraging, can't it?

Most of us would say...I need more than forgiveness for the past. I need power right now! I need help for the struggles I'm going to face today, tomorrow and the next day!

Is that kind of power really available? Is it possible for God, through His power, to change me? Is it possible for somebody who is basically selfish to become unselfish? Is it possible for somebody who's basically thoughtless to become kind? Is it possible for somebody who's basically

immoral to become faithful? Is it possible for somebody who's known as a "hot head" to become self-controlled? Do I have power over temptation?

Wouldn't it be wonderful if all that were possible? I want to tell you something: The resurrection of Jesus Christ makes that possible!

- Because of the power of the resurrection, God has the ability to change human beings! I don't have to sin...I have the power over temptation.

Do you know what Paul wrote to the Ephesians?

"I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints..."

... and His incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of His mighty strength, which He exerted in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly realm" (Ephesians 1:18-20).

Did you get that? God's power is available to you and me today! It's no wonder Paul writes to the Philippians:

"I want to know Christ and the power of His resurrection..." (Phil. 3:10a).

-New Series "God's Power for Your Family"

Frankly, it's possible to trivialize the Good News of the Gospel! Sometimes, people talk about becoming a Christian as if it's nothing more than just turning over a new leaf, or becoming a little more religious, or making some superficial changes in our lives.

I want you to understand that becoming a Christian means you and I have the power of the resurrection of Jesus to live this life. Becoming a Christian is nothing less than a resurrection from spiritual death to spiritual life!

We have the power of Christ available to us right now to face all the struggles we're going to face in this life! p.15

Eg. Have you heard about Laminin? Laminin is a protein molecule that forms one of the foundations for the cells and organs in our bodies.

I'm not a scientist, but if you do a little research on Laminin, you find phrases that describe it as...

"An integral part of the structural scaffolding in almost every tissue of an organism."

In other words, Laminin is like the rebar in concrete that gives strength and helps to hold together the cells of our bodies.

Do you want to see a scientific model of Laminin? Here it is...

I understand there are all kinds of other scientific models for molecules in our bodies that don't make the

shape of a cross. But I think that's a wonderful illustration of what Paul wrote to the Colossians:

"For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities;

all things were created by Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17).

Of course they do! Everything in my life is held together by the power of Jesus Christ. It's no wonder that Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

"If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (2 Corinthians 5:17).

What is holding you together in the struggles of life? When I choose to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, it guarantees pardon for the sin of my past. It guarantees power over the struggles of my present.

3. IT ALSO GUARANTEES THE PROMISE OF SECURITY FOR TOMORROW!

I hope you're with me...

Eg. Did you hear about the recent arrest of the leaders of a so-called "Christian militia" group that was plotting to kill law enforcement officers? This militia group reportedly trains in tiger-striped camouflage uniforms with shoulder patches bearing a black cross.

They said they are *"preparing for the end time battles to keep the testimony of Jesus Christ alive."*

In other words, this militia group believes that somehow by battling the government, they can guarantee the victory at Armageddon.

I want you to listen carefully. There is nothing Christian nor Biblical about that kind of theology. There is nothing you and I can do to guarantee the victory of Jesus. **He has already guaranteed it!** He guaranteed spiritual victory through His resurrection. Look at these words of Paul to the Corinthians:

"For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.'

Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:52-55, 57).

Do you understand this is one of the great differences between the claims of Christ and other religious leaders?

Other religions suggest that we can accomplish peace and harmony on this earth through our actions. Other religions

suggest if you die as a martyr, you'll guarantee the mortality of your own soul. Jesus never promised any of that!

Because of His resurrection, He promised that some day He's going to make everything brand new. All the heartache and the pain of this life will be done. Peter describes it as,

"In keeping with His promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness" (2 Peter 3:13).

Eg. If you're a basketball fan, you know the Cleveland Cavaliers welcomed back this week, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, the 7' 4" center, who's been a part of their team for over a decade.

If you don't know the story, he was traded away, released from his contract by his new team, and resigned by the Cavaliers for their stretch run into the playoffs toward a championship.

When Z came back to town, he said, *"I have some unfinished business so I wanted to resign with the Cavaliers."* Of course, he's referring to an NBA championship the Cavs have never won.

Do you understand that Jesus Christ has some unfinished business with those who believe in His resurrection? The Bible says it like this in Revelation 21:

"He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4).

Eg. Joni Eareckson was tragically injured in a diving accident as a teenager. She has lived as a quadriplegic for several decades now.

Recently, she wrote,

"I have hope in the future. The Bible speaks about bodies being glorified. I know the meaning of that. It's the time after my death when I, the quadriplegic, will be on my feet dancing."

That's a promise of tomorrow guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ!

Maybe you're thinking, *"Well, isn't that just wishful thinking? Aren't Christians just whistling in the dark in order to keep their spirits up? Is there any evidence this world is going to be reborn and that there will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain?"*

Do you know the answer? Look at the empty tomb! It's the guarantee that our bodies will be changed and this world will be changed! That doesn't happen by my power or by my energy or through my effort. It happens because of the resurrection power of Jesus Christ!

CONCLUSION

1. Many of us have been burned by the promises of somebody else. We've been taught, *"If it sounds too good*

to be true, it probably is.” TV commercials promise us health, beauty and wealth, if we’ll just buy their products. It doesn’t take long to realize the world is full of empty promises.

God doesn’t work that way. God’s never made a promise that was too good to be true. He always delivers and the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the guarantee of that. Offers pardon for sin of past, power for struggles of the present, promise of security for tomorrow.

Eg. Many years ago, Winston Churchill helped arrange the details for his own funeral before his death. After he died, the service was held in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London.

Two military buglers were placed high in the cathedral. The first bugler played taps, the standard bugle call for a fallen soldier. Then there was a long pause.

The second bugler on the other side started to play reveille, the morning wake-up call for soldiers.

It was Churchill’s way of saying, *“You may be saying goodbye to me today, but because of Christ, I’m saying, ‘Hello to the kingdom of heaven.’”*

That’s the power of the resurrection to provide security for our tomorrow!

I want to ask you this question:

Is there any real hope for your life...hope that provides pardon for the sin of your past, power for your present and the promise of security for tomorrow?

You can experience that hope in Jesus Christ...