

The Defeat of Death-Part 2
The Argument for the Resurrection
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To hear these baptismal testimonies today, I think it's to remember, if you listen closely, that Christianity is not a philosophy, this is not a set of principles to live by, this is not a kind of self-help program. I mean, this is about a relationship with God through the person Jesus Christ. And I think some people approach Christianity as a philosophy, as a way of life and they never even want to concentrate too much on the person of Christ because if they do they're afraid what they might find. They are, I think, concerned that perhaps all of this is based on a lie, to be frank. Because it makes no sense for us to claim to have a real relationship with the living God through a mediator who makes intercession for us, he makes us right before God, if he is in fact just the dead, long since passed, leader of a set of teachings. I mean, the Christian faith is based on, and by faith I don't mean crossing your fingers and hoping something is true that we know is not true, but I mean, the tenet, the corpus of what we say makes us right with God, the entire system of theology is based on the fact that Jesus is not dead.

And I would dare anyone in the modern age to get back to looking at that objectively, not being afraid to uncover what that claim means. You need to be sure. You need to be confident. And in a day like ours we need to be confident more than ever. This is a time to make sure that you know that you know. That what we claim is something that is truthful. The veracity, the reliability, the authenticity of the claim of the resurrection is critical.

If there was a rumor this morning that Pastor Mike was not going to be here at the service and you just came on campus and maybe you had a chance to drive through the parking lot and you know where I park and you saw my car there. You know where my office is, you walk by my office, you saw the lights on. Maybe you walked back by where the mic packs are kept and you saw Pastor Mike's mic pack is out. You look at that and say, "Well, you know what, they say he's not here but I think he is here." And that would be evidence that perhaps I am.

But there are lots of things you could do to explain away those things. There's something much more compelling. And that would be if you ran into some really honest and integrous people who said, you know, "I know the rumors going around that Pastor Mike's not here today and he's not going to be preaching and he's not going to be in the service, but I saw him here. I saw him in the hallway. I saw him come out of his study. I talked to him and talked about the sermon and I know he's here today." That would be far more compelling. Not to mention if I texted you and I said, "Listen here, I'm telling you I am preaching this morning. I am here, I am on the campus and I am ready to go." Those would be strong things for you, even though you don't see me here, to sit here ten minutes before the service and say, "I know he's here."

So often in our songs and our poetry and in the way we think about the resurrection we often point to the empty tomb. There's nothing wrong with that, that's compelling evidence. We talk about the shroud and the linen cloths that he was wrapped in being there. And that's great. And that is evidence, but that's not where the Bible focuses. I mean the first 12 verses of Luke 24, as we work our way through Luke, we've seen that the, you know, the claim is he's risen and the tomb is empty and that's evidence, like my car being in the spot or my office lights being on and my mic pack being, you know, out of the charging slot, "Yeah, I think he's here, perhaps he's here." But far more compelling are the encounters that honest and integrous people have, saying, "I saw him. I talked to him." People who saw him be crucified say, "I get it, he's here because I saw him here, I talked to

him."

The writing of the Gospels in the mid-first century was not the first written extant records of the resurrection of Christ. Matter of fact, First Corinthians predates that. If you are going to look for in the biblical canon of the New Testament what is the earliest record that explains in detail the resurrection of Christ, you'd have to point to First Corinthians Chapter 15. And in First Corinthians Chapter 15 I just want to read for you just a section where the topic comes up and I want you to see where the emphasis is. Here's what it says, starting in verse 3. Paul says, "I delivered to you Corinthians as the first importance what I received and that is that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scripture." In other words, here was the message, you got the texted message. And "then he was buried, then he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures." There were clear statements about this being truthful. But then it says, "and then he appeared to Cephas and then to the twelve. And then he appeared to more than 500 brothers even at one time, most of them are still alive," you can talk to them, "though some have fallen asleep and he appeared to James after that and then all the apostles. And last of all, Paul says, "he appeared to me."

Bodily resurrected Christ. The emphasis in the New Testament is on the appearances of a resurrected Christ. You see him be crucified by professional Roman executioners and then you see him appear and you talk to him and you touch his hands and you touch his side and you have a meal with him and you break bread with him and you eat some fish with him. And he stands up and talks and teaches, just like he did before he was crucified, to about 500 people. Well, that's compelling.

I sure wish we had more time for this passage, but I need you to look at this text in Luke Chapter 24 verses 13 through 35. Let's just tackle the biggest section we've ever tackled in Luke at one time in the shortest sermon allotment I've ever had. Why not? This is a scene you might remember, Jesus appears to two people on the road to Emmaus. It's a long text, I won't even read you the whole text. To start with let me just read you the section I want to comment on first of all, which is a long section versus 13 through 24. "That very day," that Sunday, look back at verse 12. "That very day two of them were going to a village named Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem." That's like walking from here to the Irvine Spectrum. That's a bit of a walk. "And they were talking with each other about all the things that had happened." Of course, in the first 12 verses, not to mention Chapter 23, a lot had happened. "And while they were talking and discussing together," verse 15, "Jesus himself drew near." Now, he was dead over the weekend, now he's bodily, physically, biologically alive, "and he went with them. But their eyes were kept from recognizing him." An interesting phrase. "And he said to them, 'What is this conversation you were holding with each other as you walk?' And they stood still looking sad." What are you talking about? Verse 18. "One of them, named, Cleopas, answered him and said, 'Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?' And he said, 'What things?'" Tell me, come on. "And they said to him, 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, a man who was a prophet, mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be condemned to death, and crucified him. We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things happened. Moreover, some women of our company amazed us. They were at the tomb early in the morning, and when they did not find his body, they came back saying that they had even seen a vision of angels, who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him.'"

I just want you to look real quickly again at verse 18. I mean, you don't know who you're talking to, I understand that. But still, that's a pretty strong statement. "Are you like, is your head in the sand?"

Are you really just coming from Jerusalem and you weren't there? I mean what kind of ignorant person are you? Are you the only visitor to Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?" That is a key and critical observation about the argument made constantly throughout the New Testament to the resurrection. I even read to you from First Corinthians Chapter 15. The magnitude and the scope of the people who know it, the people who have seen it and in that case the people who saw the resurrected Christ. It is such a big thing. It is an inescapable buzz. It is the news. It's not like a lot of religious claims where people go into a cave and say, "I have come out and I got this information," or, you know, "We've got this little thing here and it's a secret and just trust us. You know, 12 guys will sign it and you just believe us." As the Apostle Paul said when he was put on trial before Herod Agrippa in the book of Acts, he said, and I love the phrase, "These things have not been done in a corner. I mean, this is not in the shadows of the back alleys. Everyone knows this. Everyone's seen this."

When it comes to the resurrection, I want you to see not only the inescapable buzz but the impact this has had on so many things. Number one, if you're taking notes, "Note Its Massive Influence." The resurrection had a massive, concentric circle of influence in the people of Jerusalem in the first century that the weekend it happened you couldn't be in the city and not know what happened. Everyone knows and everyone was talking and the focus is now going to shift, as we've just seen the resurrection in the first 12 verses, to the fact that he is alive. And that was the scene. And as Paul writes in First Corinthians 15, tons of people saw him. You can go interview them. You can go talk to them. They watched him die. He was in a grave for the weekend. And you can see them now claiming very clearly they've seen him alive. That's massive influence.

As I quoted for you last week from the book of Acts, they just got sick of hearing it, everyone talking about the resurrection. Jot this reference down, Acts Chapter 17 verses 6 through 8. "They dragged some of the people, the believers, the followers of Christ before the city authorities and they said, 'These men who've turned the world upside down have now even come to our city.'" This thing is erupting. "And they're acting against the decrees of Caesar, saying there's another king and his name is Jesus. And the people and the city authorities were disturbed when they heard these things."

There was a PBS special on. It was a documentary and the title of it was "Why Christianity Succeeded." Why was it successful? And it is interesting to hear how the world tries to explain, "How did this thing catch on? Why? Was it the right political climate?" I mean, "Did these guys have the right message?" Which is all the theory in these documentaries. "Well, I don't know. It just was a simple Jewish rabbi and he had great teaching but then it caught on. It just caught on. It was a perfect storm for this."

Jesus had another explanation. He says, "You kill this temple, you tear me down, you kill me, in three days I'm going to rise again." And he says things like this in Matthew 16, "I'm going to build my church," present tense. "I am going to build my church. I've got a kingdom. I'm a king. It's going to start like a little mustard seed. It's going to be put in the ground and it is going to grow and it is going to grow and it is going to grow until the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." This is going to be huge. And, you know, it didn't take many years and the whole point of the PBS special was this dominated the Roman Empire by the 4th century, the entire Roman Empire was "Christianized." Not everyone was a Christian, but they were all marching around saying, "Jesus is resurrected. He's alive." He's the leader of this thing called Christianity and he is actively building his church. And the impact on your calendar, we still date our entire calendar off the fact that this rabbi, this carpenter son was a teacher of good morals? No. That he was a king of a kingdom and

that death could not defeat him and that he's alive and he's risen.

Churches. Think about how many people this morning, if you had a microphone and you can do what we just did on this platform (baptism testimonies), you could pass the microphone around and sure, a lot of non-Christians in church, I get that, some of you here probably you are just spectators. But there's a lot of people, I would hope a large majority of people in this room, could get up and talk about, just like we heard this morning, how people's lives encountering Jesus has changed everything for them.

Talk about churches all over the world right now, not worshipping a dead philosopher. We're not sitting here talking about Nietzsche or Marx or we're not talking about Confucius or Buddha, we were talking about a living Christ who people all over this world are worshipping right now and singing about a risen, living Christ. I mean, that alone, what a phenomenon that is. Not to mention how the living Christ has affected culture around the world, calendars, churches, culture. The influence of Christianity based on a living Christ, the claim of a risen Christ, it's just undeniable.

Does that put this thing to bed in my mind as a skeptic? Absolutely not. I guess everyone would be crazy. I guess they could all be a group of deceivers. It's just as they tried to foist some kind of lie on the people. That could be, I suppose. Except for the fact that Jesus responds to all that by getting back to something solid and objective and propositional. Look at it in verse 25, printed on your worksheet, Luke 24:25. "And he said to them," oh, I know everyone's talking about it and there are a lot of stories about people seeing the risen Christ and talking about an empty tomb. That's true. "But I want to say how foolish you are to be so slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!" Not what the women said, not what the angels said, not that the tomb is empty, not that there's a linen shroud there, not that people claim to have seen him. All of that's important and it's changing the world, it's changing that city the very day it happens. But he said look at Scripture. "Was it not," here's a good word to highlight, "Was it not necessary that the Christ, the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets," Moses, that represented Genesis through Deuteronomy, the first five books of the Bible, and then the rest of the Old Testament, the prophetic writings, "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." He gave us two categories here. He talks about the suffering and he talks about entering into his glory. And the Scripture, it says, is this thing that "necessitates," look at that word in verse 26, "Was it not necessary" for all this to happen?

Number two. The argument for the resurrection coming straight from the lips of Jesus Christ is this: number two, is that it's biblically necessary. You need to "See Its Biblical Necessity." The resurrection of Christ is not just an empty tomb, it's not just appearances, it's not just testimonials of the impact it's made on Jerusalem and the world ever since. Best-selling book ever. Biggest religion, the most widespread belief of a risen Christ. I mean, this is massively influential but it gets back to a Book. And here Jesus is saying, "Look at the Book." We have 400 silent years, we call them, from Malachi until the time that John the Baptist is born and Jesus comes on the scene. And as I've often said, it's like God puts a pin in all that biblical revelation to make sure that no one thinks that this is an anachronistic, that this somehow was predicted after the fact and made to look like it was a bunch of predictions before Christ came. You can go back to the passage we looked at last week in Genesis 3 and see God starting to drop the plan. Here is the plan, I'm going to come and fix the problem.

Now there are two ways the Scripture makes this necessary. One of them we focused on last week but let me at least just itemize it for you and let's just say this: it is theologically necessary. The

Bible theologically necessitates the risen, resurrected Messiah. That's because the whole point in Genesis was, "If you obey me you'll have life, you disobey me there's going to be consequences called death, both relational and biological and then eventually a second death. And now what you need to realize is I'm going to fix the problem. From the offspring of a woman there will be a deliverer who will crush this tempter and his offspring, sin and death will be done. I'm going to fix it." And then everything unfolds.

We can't even get out of the Pentateuch, the first five books of Moses, without seeing this one who is going to come, a prophet, a mouthpiece, who is going to be way better than Moses, who is going to speak for God, solve the problems, fix the sin problem and redeem the world.

Now there are two categories here that I could move from the theological necessity to the textual necessity, and that is the prophets speak about two things, the suffering and the glory of Christ. The textual necessity is that when you speak of the Messiah in the Bible you see two things, the suffering and the glory. Now, if I'm going to look through Scripture, if we had two hours together, we could find a ton of passages about the glory of the Messiah. I mean, all these statements where this one is going to come and he's going to not be like God, who dwells in unapproachable light, this invisible God, but he's going to have feet and he's going to have toenails and those toes are going to step on the Mount of Olives and he's going to change everything, he is going to rule and reign on a throne. He's going to be like a son of man. He's going to be like a human being. But all of deity will dwell in him in bodily form, to quote the New Testament about this picture of this prophetic person who is going to come. The glory of the Messiah is everywhere in Scripture. The glory of the Messiah? Yeah, we see it everywhere. What was hard for people to catch as they said, if you look back up in verse 21, "We had hope that he was the one to redeem Israel." You know what they wanted? I just want to see the glory of the Messiah.

But here was the prediction and we quote it often. It wouldn't be bad for us to look at. Let's turn to Isaiah 53. Isaiah 53 reminds us that this Christ textually necessitates that he dies and he suffers. And then you'll see, even if I show you in the last stanza of this prophetic statement, that he will rise again. I mean that picture is there. He will receive his glory. But he first has to suffer. Now that should make theological sense as well. Because I'm going to solve the problem. I've given you an entire worship system in the Old Testament that shows that there must be a sacrifice. There has to be a suffering, there has to be a payment for sin to be paid for. And so it would make theological sense but it makes textual sense as well because the text of Scripture necessitates that the great Messiah would suffer and that he would die.

There's so much we could say here through this whole passage if we had time to go through it. Everything speaks of him like a lamb and he's going to be slaughtered so that we might be saved. But just to jump near the end of this, look at verse 8, Isaiah 53:8. "He's going to by oppression and judgment be taken away." There's a statement of his death. "As for his generation, who considered that he was cut off from the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?" Well, they all did, of course they did. He's dying, he's dead. He dies on a Roman execution rack. This, by the way, is 770 years before Christ died on a cross.

"They made his grave with the wicked." You only assign a grave to someone who's dead. He died by professional executioners. "And with a rich man in his death." We saw that last time, Joseph Arimathea gives him a very opulent grave of a rich man, himself. "Although he had done no violence." Well, we've all done some violence. "There's no deceit in his mouth." Everyone's a sinner. Everyone is going to lie with their lips. And yet he is the perfect one. "Yet it was the will of

the Lord to crush him." Why would you crush a person who's never lied, never deceived, never done violence? Well, "He's going to put them to grief, so that when his soul makes an offering for guilt," that's the Lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. There will be someone who will absorb the penalty that we deserve.

Well, if he's going to absorb that and he's going to be cut off from the land of the living, verse 8, if he's going to be given a grave, verse 9, he's dead, if he's going to be with a rich man in his death, I guess he's dead. Dead, dead, dead, and dead people stay dead. It was a horrible, crushing, grievous process, and yet it says, "he shall see his offspring." Did he have offspring? Just like Paul did when he says to Titus, Paul had no wife, he had no kids, biologically. He calls Titus, he calls Timothy, my true son in the faith. Yeah, Jesus had offspring, he had all of these followers, disciples. That's what they're called. And he sees them after his soul is crushed, after he's been given a grave, after he's been cut off from the land of the living. That spells resurrection.

"And he," God, "shall prolong his days." We'll wait a minute, he's dead. No, it's "the will of the Lord, it's going to prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul," verse 11, "he," that is God the Father, "will see and be satisfied." The Father will see the anguish of Christ on a cross and say sin is satisfied, sin has been paid for. "By his knowledge," by who he was, "shall my righteous one, my servant, make many to be..." This is a great word. There's a New Testament equivalent. We see it over and over again, "to be accounted righteous." You're not righteous, I'm not righteous, but were counted as righteous. It's credited to us as righteousness. Why? "Because he will bear their iniquities." I'll take your sin upon my life. I'll put my righteousness on you. You can be accepted in Christ.

"Therefore," God says, "I will divide him a portion with the many." You're going to come back like a victor from war. "He shall divide the spoil with the strong." I thought he was dead? Why? "Because he poured out his soul to death." He was dead. "And he was numbered with the transgressors." He was. "Yet he bore the sins of many." Notice that the present tense here. "And makes intercession for the transgressors." Do you know who doesn't make intercession for anyone? Dead people. The living Christ interceding for the lost because he pours out his soul unto death. And in a passage like this you start to grapple with the grief and the suffering that the Scripture speaks of. The Bible says it's going to happen. Suffering of the servant of Christ, the Messiah, a lamb of God, and Jesus himself speaks in the third person about himself. He said, "Wasn't it necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" The glory of Christ everyone wanted. But they didn't realize the glory of Christ is going to come after the suffering of Christ. That spells resurrection and Jesus said it's all found in the Word.

On the back of your worksheet I always provide you some books to go further but maybe there's a book there somewhere that would drive you back into Scripture. Go to our bookstore, pick it up after the service, get your nose in the Book and see what it says about the suffering servant, the Messiah who would come. And that he would be one who would not only be glorified and sit on the throne of his father, David, and rule over all of the people who were submissive to him, not just in Israel, but every tongue, tribe and nation. And recognize that before that there would be a horrible, terrible, shameful death that would take place. The resurrection, as well as the crucifixion to precede it, was biblically necessary, both theologically and textually. Suffering was the means of redemption. The glory is the benefit that we get to share in.

"And as they got close to the village," verse 28, "to which they were going, he acted as if he were going farther." Of course, sovereignly he's not, but he's going to keep on walking unless you're

going to ask him to come and stay with you. And in this case, that's how he works. "But they urged him strongly, saying, 'Stay with us. It is toward evening and the day is now far spent.' So he went in to stay with them." Great. I'm glad you asked. "And when he was at the table with them, he took the bread and blessed and broke it and gave it to them." Don't think this is a celebration of the Lord's Supper. It wouldn't spark in their minds that. I do think it's part of what Jesus was known for obviously. Every time he fed the crowds he'd stand up, he would pray, he would break the bread, the traditional thing that would happen in Judaism. They had that moment there though as he broke the bread. Take a look at this, verse 31, "And their eyes were opened and," they said this is him, "they recognized him."

And then, as we see in other Gospels as well, something interesting about the glorified body of Christ. It's real. It's tactile. You can touch it. He can eat. He's got taste buds, he's got teeth, he's got an esophagus, he's got a stomach and yet, BAM, he's gone. "He vanishes from their sight." And now they got a chance to de-brief, Cleopas and his friend, "They said to each other," verse 32, "did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road while he," I love this focus, "opened to us the Scriptures." Our hearts were burning. "And they rose that same hour and returned to Jerusalem." I thought it was late? I thought it was evening it says in verse 29. It doesn't matter. We're going to go back to Jerusalem. "They found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together saying, 'The Lord has risen indeed and he's appeared to Simon,'" they were saying. They get it, they got it. And yes, he's appeared to us. "Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he was known to them," in that moment, "in the breaking of the bread."

I know whenever we talk about Christianity and you might have gone there in your mind in the first point when I started talking about the massive not-done-in-a-corner kind of Christianity rooted in the historical life and death and resurrection. When I start talking in those terms, you think well that's a lot of subjective experience. Well that's objectively impacting a society in a city and it's objectively impacted the world. But if you start looking at individuals like we've done this morning and hearing their stories you might want to discount that kind of personal experience with Christ. But before you do that you need to be careful. This is not the, you know, the UFO Club or the Flat Earth Society. Right? This isn't just some little breakoff group who sits here saying ridiculous things. You know, this is a group of people that has transcended every culture, every language, in every generation. It's not just the blue-collar working class or some uneducated group of people. It's coming from Luke, the physician, all the way to the fishermen in Galilee. And ever since, I mean we've got common people, obviously, that put their trust in Christ in every tongue, tribe and nation around the world. But we've got mathematicians, we've got scholars, we've got philosophers, we've got doctors, we have people that from every walk of life with every level of intelligence dealing with the claim of a resurrection and they claim, just like we've heard in the baptismal tank this morning, there was a moment when all of this became crystal clear to me. The Scripture was opened up to us. We burned in our own hearts with this as a truth. And then all of a sudden there's an encounter with a person.

We're not encountering him like they did on the road to Emmaus. We're not having a tactile experience with the bodily Christ because I know where he is and he's there until he comes back again at the right hand of the Father. We know that after Acts 1, he's not coming back to visit you in your bedroom. But the Bible says he dwells with you. Christ dwells in your heart, Colossians says, by faith. Why? Because he's given you his Spirit. And the Bible says that Spirit, in the Upper Room Discourse in John Chapter 14 through 16, is going to come and not leave you an orphan. And that's why Jesus could say in Matthew 28, "I am with you always even to the end of the age." I'm going to leave but you're going to have an encounter with God because you're going to be resident with me



because my Spirit is going to live in you. When that Spirit comes it changes everything.

And there are people who can testify to this and at some point you can't dismiss the subjective testimony of people when it starts to cross every boundary, it's a universal experience, it's not provincial, it's not one slice of life, it's not just the psychologically dependent, it's not just the dumb, it's not just the smart, it's not just the ivory tower, it's not just the trenches of life. It is all kinds of people from every walk of life who can stand up and say, "I've had an encounter, spiritually, with the risen Christ. I have a real relationship with him through the Spirit of God." It's based on a promise. It's based on an objective text. It's rooted in historical events. And you have to stand back at some point and say, "Wow, the personal impact of the resurrection is real."

Number three, just consider that, "Consider Its Personal Impact." The resurrected Christ has made an impact on person after person after person. Not only are there churches all over the world, there are people in those churches who had a burning, if you will, that sense of, "I get it. The truth of this is real. I'm willing to admit it." So many of the baptismal testimonies, particularly last night, so many great testimonies about, "I realize my selfishness. I realize my pride. I realize how I was trying to put God at an arm's distance." We heard it today as well. Then that changes because of the work and power of a living and active Bible. Hebrews Chapter 4:12, "It is living and active, sharper than a two-edged sword, discerning our thoughts and the intentions," and motives, "of our hearts."

And then God unleashes his Spirit in our lives and the Bible says, I love just in the book of John alone, it wells up to a spring of living water. You drink that water, you'll thirst, if you drink this water, it's different. You eat that bread, you'll be hungry again, you eat this bread, you will have a kind of satisfaction, it will change who you are. And there are people who testify to that every day all over the world and there are a ton of them in this church and there's a bunch of them, if you'd go to a small group you can sit and talk with the people whose lives have been changed by the resurrected Christ. The conviction, the boldness, the transformation.

Acts 19 is one example of many. Here they were in this city, many of those who were believers now, came confessing and divulging their practices. "A number of those who had practiced the magic arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. They counted the value of them and they found it came to 50,000 pieces of silver," 50,000 drachma, to use the Greek phrase here, the monetary unit. That's about, at least, \$5,000,000 worth of assets, just burned. Why? Because as it says in Scripture, First Thessalonians Chapter 1, I mean, here comes the God of the Bible and the encounter with Christ and people turn to God, they turn from idols, they serve that living God, they wait for the Son to come back from heaven, this God who sent his Son and raised him from the dead, it says in First Thessalonians 1:10, "This Jesus who delivers us from the wrath that is to come."

I love that, just three verses earlier it says, "This gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction." Again, it doesn't mean much, I suppose to you, to hear one person tell their story because they are a lot of people looking at a lot of crazy things, they carry a pebble around in their pocket, they think it's changed my life and you can roll your eyes at that, but eventually you're going to have to sit back and say there's something to the subjectivity of that experience with the resurrected Christ based on the objectivity of history, based on the fact that this is an across the board kind of experience that people have. There's something more here than just teaching. There's something more here than theory and theology. It's all about those eyes being opened and a lot of people purposefully close their eyes.

Thomas Jefferson, the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, interestingly enough he died on July 4th, 50 years after the signing of the declaration at age 83. Sadly, Thomas Jefferson lived a lot like a lot of the Christians I know live today. And that is they want some benefit from Christianity, they want some overflow of the ethics, they want some of the niceties of, you know, love your neighbor and golden rule and all that stuff. They just don't want anything that seems too demanding and they certainly don't want anything that's crazy like miracles or some phenomenon like a risen Christ. Because Jefferson didn't want that, his impudence, his pride, he literally took out his pocket knife and cut out sections of the New Testament that he did not like. Can you imagine that? The result of it can still be found. Go on the Internet, look up the Jefferson Bible, it's still out there. I mean, the New Testament story of Jesus, but let's just take out the parts I don't like. It's been going on ever since. His deistic beliefs led him to that kind of cafeteria-style reading of the Bible.

Well on the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence he dies, without independence from his sins, by the way, without hope, without any investment in eternity, without any confidence in a risen Christ. Ironically at his funeral Pastor Fred Hatch read from the Book of Common Prayer. If you know anything about the Episcopal Church, the early church in colonial America, beginning of our country, that was standard fare. You get up, you read from the book, you do the thing at the funeral. And so it is that that book is filled with Scripture. And you read through it, you put the names in there, I know Thomas Jefferson. And you'd go through it and as pastor Hatch did that, he got to the section where it quotes in John 11 verse 25, it says from the Jesus scene there Jesus' encounter with Mary and Martha at the grave and death of Lazarus, he says, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me though he die yet shall he live." You trust in me, you're going to die biologically, but you're going to live after that. And anyone who lives and believes in me, he's never going to die. Something with the unmitigated, unrestrained blessing of God, you'll have the favor of God, and that's where the quote in the Common Book of Prayer ends.

And then it goes on to some other stuff you'd expect to hear at a funeral. But that's not the whole verse. Matter of fact, it quotes verse 25 and a half of 26. But the rest of 26, I suppose if you really know your Bibles well or you think back to the context, you remember what Jesus said next. John 11:26b, the bottom of that verse, Jesus looks at Martha in the eyes and he says this, "Do you believe this?" Well, I can answer most assuredly that Thomas Jefferson did not. It was one of the many passages that he'd cut out of the Bible with his penknife. A verse that was intended by Pastor Hatch to give some kind of comfort to the people in the room. A section of Scripture that Jefferson desperately needed at that point. It would have been great, it would have been so right, had he trusted in a risen Christ, but there he was dead in his sins.

No, he didn't believe it. I hope you believe it. It's not crossing our fingers and hoping it's true without any research. It's calling you like so many others have done to look at the facts of what God has promised in Scripture and that is the first and foremost living miracle you have is looking at the prophetic Word regarding Christ, seeing it fulfilled in Jesus, having that Jesus being testified to by hundreds of people who saw him raised from the dead, and then deciding what you're going to do with his words. I would call you to look at this seriously, perhaps like you never have before. It's time for you to rein in your skepticism or your avoidance, which I think is the problem for so many. They just don't want to look hard at the historical Christ because they're afraid it might fall apart.

I'd be remiss on a morning like this when we hear such great baptismal testimonies of people's lives being transformed by the Gospel, not to at least to call you to consider where you stand with Christ. Think about it. No promise that you'll live to the ripe old age of 83 like Thomas Jefferson did. Are you ready? You're going to face your own mortality at some point. Our churches aren't surrounded



like they used to be in our grandparent's age when you go to church and walk past the headstones of your beloved departed. Today we've sanitized our world. We swept death under the carpet to the edges of society, but this is what it's all about.

Are we ready? Is our trust in the right place or have we, perhaps not literally, but at least emotionally and psychologically and thoughtfully taken our penknife and cut out the parts of the Bible that seem for us a little too difficult to grasp in our modern age. And yet as we've said last week, and I tried to at least touch on this week, the biblical prophetic necessity of this should compel us to realize that when Christ said this, when he taught it, when the prophet spoke to it, you got no other choice to either deny what it says, to call these peoples liars or lunatics, one or the other, or to recognize that perhaps this is true, because you're confident in the veracity of the resurrection and allow that to have an impact on you as it has on so many others. Stop fighting it. If you haven't done your homework, let's do our homework, so you know you're ready, so that I can read at your funeral if I happened to outlive you, that you were one who responded to Jesus' words regarding being the resurrection and the life. When Martha was asked, "Do you believe it" I can stand up and say I know he believed it. I know she believed it.

Do some business with God this morning. Would you bow your heads? Just make sure. You want to turn me off and check out, I guess that's your prerogative. But God dignifies you this morning by calling you to repentance, calling you to faith and confidence in him. Can you look in your own heart and make sure, know that you know? And if you can't get there yet you need to dig into this more. We're not just here on Sunday morning just trying to talk through some kind of ethical course for the world that we might be living a little better than our neighbors. It's about sinners finding hope in Christ. Transgressors being completely forgiven and washed of our sins knowing that we're qualified to the inheritance that's coming for Christians because we believe in the resurrected Christ. God, I ask, even now, that you'd give that encounter with some people in this room right now.

God, lead some folks today to do business with you who have never done business with you. Maybe they've completely ignored this, they've stuffed it, they've suppressed the truth in their unrighteousness. Let it be a day of facing this squarely head-on. And God, for those who can say, "Mike, I am there. I already know all this and I believe it, I trust in him." Then God, I pray we can be like those bold convicted outspoken apostles in the book of Acts. Not afraid to stand up and say that we follow a risen Christ, even if it annoys our culture as it did in the book of Acts. God help us to turn the world upside down just like they claimed those early apostles did. Let us teach about the resurrected Christ and live as though he's alive.

In Jesus name. Amen.