

The Easter Surprises

Mark 16:1-8

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The darkest day in history has passed, Jesus Christ has been crucified and His lifeless body is in the grave. Now it's Sunday and the brightest day in history has begun to dawn. It was the day that would bring eternal light and life to all who would trust and believe in Christ. It was the day that Jesus rose from the dead conquering sin and death. It was the greatest event in human history. The Resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ was a historic event.

This event begins in Mark 16:1-3. "Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen." This is Sunday morning. "And they said among themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?'"

As they were approaching, they were coming to finish the burial process on Jesus' body. Jesus was crucified on Friday. On Friday at sundown began the Sabbath, so they couldn't prepare the body in the way they wanted to. They were hurried in the preparation—the ointment, the cloth—so they had to hurriedly bury Jesus. Then on Easter Sunday morning, the women went very early to finish the preparation of Jesus' body.

These women weren't going to see the Resurrection. They all went there weeping, unbelieving, despairing; they didn't believe that Jesus would rise from the dead. They didn't even believe He would be crucified; they thought He was the Messiah and He would set up His kingdom. So all their hopes had been shattered.

So we have Jesus crucified on Friday, what we sometimes call "Black Sabbath" on Saturday, when Jesus' body lie lifeless in the grave, then on Sunday morning, these women went early in the morning to the grave. But their concern was who would roll away the stone that was in front of the sepulcher. The women went to the grave trusting that God would solve this problem. There was the stone, the seal and the soldiers that concerned them. God took care of all these fears.

Easter is about not fearing. The angel said to the women, "Do not be alarmed." Easter actually speaks to the fact that our fears can be dealt with because of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We don't have to be afraid. The Lord went ahead of them and took care of these issues.

That Easter morning, when they came to the tomb, there were three surprises, verses 4-6. "But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed" or "afraid." "But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.'"

All four of the Gospels—Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—record the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. When all four Gospels record an event, you know it's important.

The first surprise is that the stone was rolled away. And the stone wasn't just rolled away; it was lifted up and thrown to the side. It was estimated that the stone had to be at least two tons in weight. I don't know what the women were thinking about how to get the stone rolled away, but God took care of it by lifting it up and throwing it to the side. This is mentioned in the Gospel of John. The Greek word used for this means that it is lifted up and thrown over to the side.

Why was the stone rolled away? It wasn't so Jesus could get out. In His new, glorified body, Jesus passed right through the stone wall of the sepulcher. The stone was rolled away so that Mary, Martha, Salome and the other women and the Apostles could go in and see that the grave was empty; the body of Jesus was gone.

The second surprise, in verse 5, was that an angel was in the grave. "And entering the tomb, they saw a young man..."—or "an angel"—"...clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed."

In comparing other passages of this event in the Bible, some say there were at least two angels in the tomb. Critics asked, "Well, how many was it?" I think it was thousands. The accounts of this event are not contradictory; they are complementary. If Mark just mentions one, it doesn't mean that there couldn't have been two, three, four or five. And I believe that whole area was just buzzing with angels. John 20:12 says there was "one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain."

When Jesus rose from the dead, He just literally passed through His grave clothes. There were these strips of grave cloths wrapped around His body and 100 pounds of ointment or spikenard with which the body was prepared. Jesus literally came out of those grave clothes. The women saw that the grave clothes were lying in the shape of His body, like a cocoon. Jesus passed through these in His new, glorified body.

Now there were two angels, one at the head and one at the feet where Jesus laid. Bible students like to point out that in the tabernacle in the Old Testament, in the holy of holies was the Ark of the Covenant, and on it were two angels facing one another with their wings touching. On the top of the Ark was the mercy seat where the presence of God dwelled. It was almost like Jesus's grave was forming a new mercy seat where God's presence dwelled and where we can meet with God. So they saw these two angels.

All through the life of Jesus there were angels. At His birth there were angels. At His temptation there were angels. At His baptism there were angels. There were angels in the Garden of Gethsemane, at the Cross, at His Resurrection. All through His life, there were angels surrounding Him.

The third surprise—and this is our focus—is that the angel had a message for the women, in verse 6. This is the first Easter sermon ever preached. It is difficult to pass up this text as an

Easter outline and message for a sermon. “But he...”—that is, “the angel”—“...said to them, ‘Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him.’” This message contains three parts. It contains a command, three assurances and an invitation.

In verse 6 we first have a command: “Do not be alarmed.” In the Greek this is literally, “Stop being afraid.” The women were afraid and fearful, so the angel told them, “Stop being afraid.” Jesus’ Resurrection means the end of our fears. We don’t need to fear life, death or eternity.

Everyone has fears and phobias. Maybe you’re worried about life. You’re worried about how you’re going to pay the mortgage or pay the rent. Or maybe you’re worried about how you’re going to find a place to rent. Or you’re worried about how you’re going to deal with your job or your struggling marriage. Your children are having problems. Maybe you’ve just been diagnosed with an incurable disease. So you’re worried about issues in life. Or maybe you’re afraid to die. One of the greatest fears men live with is the fear of death.

But there is no fear in death. In Revelation 1:17-18, when John was on the Isle of Patmos, he saw the risen, glorified, exalted Christ in heaven, who said to him, “Do not be afraid. I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.” Jesus has authority over hell and death. So we don’t have to fear life or death or where we go once we die. That’s the Christian life.

Someone once said—and I’ve always liked it—“You’re not ready to live until you’re ready to die.” Once you’re ready to die, and you’re not worried about where you’re going to go once you die, you can really enjoy your life. What a blessing that we don’t need to fear eternity!

I like the famous Psalm 23. “The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.” And when David comes to the end of the psalm, he makes the amazing statement, “I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” Don’t you like that? When the Lord is your shepherd, then and only then can you say, “I will...”—not “maybe,” not “I might,” not “I hope I will,” but “I will”—“...dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” I like the certainty of David’s statement.

So if you’re living with fear today, Jesus Christ can conquer your fears.

Now notice the three assurances in verse 6. There are three assurances that the angel gave the women that first Easter morning. He told them not to be afraid, and now he gives them assurances. First, he said that Jesus was crucified. The angel told them, “You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified.” Jesus was crucified on the Cross. You can’t have a resurrection without first having a crucifixion.

Jesus’ life on earth starts with the Incarnation; Jesus was a man born of a virgin. He was the God-man. Then it goes to the Crucifixion where Jesus died on the Cross voluntarily and vicariously. It was a substitutionary death; He took our place on the Cross and died in our stead. He was the sinless Son of God, but He gave His life for ours. Then it goes to the Resurrection, as Jesus rose physically, bodily from the grave. Then it moves to the Ascension,

when Jesus visibly, physically, bodily rose back into heaven. They watched Him go to heaven. Then lastly it goes to the exaltation; Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, the place of authority, in heaven.

And it's not over yet; Jesus is coming back. The same Jesus who was crucified, buried, rose, ascended and exalted is coming back and will set up His kingdom forever. There never will be an end to the Davidic kingdom.

So Jesus was crucified "for our sins," it says in 1 Corinthians 15:3. That was why Jesus died: He died to take away our sins. He died as a substitution for us. Isaiah 53:5 says, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities...and by His stripes we are healed." Our sins were placed on Christ, so that His righteousness was given to us. The theological term for that is "imputation"; He took our sins, then His righteousness was imputed to us and that makes us righteous in Jesus Christ.

The second assurance, in verse 6, is that Jesus is risen. The angel said, "He is risen!" Jesus "was crucified" but now "He is risen!" The Bible is very clear that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. And all four Gospels record the Resurrection story of Jesus Christ.

What kind of resurrection was it? It wasn't a spiritual resurrection. It wasn't a metaphysical resurrection. Some people say, "I believe in the Resurrection of Jesus. I believe everyone is resurrected. I believe it was a metaphysical resurrection." No. It was a literal, bodily resurrection. Jesus' body came out of the grave.

It's not right to say Jesus rose from the grave spiritually. Biblically speaking, the only true resurrection actually is a physical resurrection, because spirits don't resurrect; they don't die. Spirits don't need to stand up; bodies stand up. The body was lying down in the grave, so it was the resurrection of the body. Jesus rose from the dead physically and bodily. So when the angel said, "He is risen," he was talking about a physical, literal, bodily resurrection.

Jesus is the only human being to ever physically die and come back from death in an immortal, eternal, glorified body never to die again. But some people get confused, because there are other people mentioned in the Bible who died, and God raised them from the dead. But they came back from the grave, from death, still in their mortal bodies and had to die again.

That's a bummer. If I die, don't pray for me to be resurrected. God will do that in His good time. So when Lazarus came out of the grave, he had to die again. But Jesus came out of the grave in an immortal, glorified, eternal body never to die again. The same body in which He was crucified was resurrected as glorified and immortal never to die again. What a glorious truth that is!

Jesus predicted His death during His public ministry. In John 2:15-16, after He had cleansed the temple, the Jewish leaders asked Him, in Luke 20:2, "Tell us, by what authority are You doing these things?" Jesus answered, in John 2:19, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will rise it up." John pointed out in verse 21, "But He was speaking of the temple of His body."

So Jesus would actually raise Himself from the grave.

The Bible teaches that God the Father raised God the Son from the dead, and that Jesus Christ raised Himself from the dead. And the Holy Spirit raised Him from the dead. All three of the Godhead were involved in raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

The third assurance, in verse 6, is that Jesus was no longer in the grave. The angel said, "He is not here." I want to shout for joy when I read these words. All of our hopes for the forgiveness of our sins and for eternity hinge on that empty tomb. What a glorious truth that is!

Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and the evidences of the Resurrection are clear. First, in our text, we see the tomb was empty. When we say "empty," it was almost empty, because the grave cloths were still there. But Jesus' body was gone.

All the critics who try to deny the Resurrection cannot deny the fact that the tomb was empty. They try to explain the empty tomb, but none of their explanations hold water. But they can't deny the fact that the body was missing.

One theory on the empty tomb is called "the swoon theory." The theory is that when Jesus was on the Cross, He didn't physically die; He just swooned or passed out. So they thought He was dead but He really wasn't. They put the ointment on Him, they put Him in the tomb, sealed it and He laid there for three days. Somehow, instead of Him dying, He revived. And somehow, in His weakened state, He was able to roll the stone away, overtake the Roman soldiers, find the disciples, appear to them in a locked room and convince them that He had risen from the dead.

I don't think so. So the swoon theory doesn't hold water.

Another theory is that a thief stole the body. It's recorded for us in the Bible in Matthew 28:11-13 where some of the guard came to the elders and chief priests and said that the tomb was empty. So they consulted together and bribed the soldiers to say that "His disciples came at night and stole Him away while we slept."

The disciples certainly wouldn't steal the body; they didn't believe He would rise from the dead. Why would they steal the body, preach that He rose from the dead and then suffer martyrdom for what they knew to be a lie? No one would die for what they know is a lie. They might believe it's true and be deceived. But if they stole the body, they would know that Jesus didn't rise from the dead, and then why would they preach that He did and face martyrdom?

And why would the Jewish authorities steal the body when they tried to stop the preaching of the Resurrection? All they would have to do is put the body in a cart, parade it down Main Street in Jerusalem and it would have killed Christianity.

And the Roman authorities didn't have any motive to steal the body.

So a-thief-stole-the body-theory doesn't hold water either.

The theory that is really hilarious is the-wrong-tomb theory. That theory is that the women were so emotional, so tearful, so upset that they got the wrong tomb; they forgot where He was laid. If the women had the wrong tomb, so did the angels who were inside the tomb. And so did Peter and John when they ran to the tomb.

If you bury a loved one on Friday and go back on Sunday, you don't forget where you put your loved one. You don't say, "Where did we put Uncle Harry?"

"I don't know. Just throw the flowers. He's out there somewhere. They'll land somewhere."

I'm sure everyone has a grave where a loved one is buried, and you don't forget where that is. You know exactly where that is.

So when the women returned, they went to the right tomb, and this wrong-tomb theory holds no water.

Now notice the second evidence of the Resurrection. It is the post-Resurrection appearances of Jesus Himself. For a period of 40 days before His Ascension, the Bible tells us in Acts 1:3, by Luke the historian, that Jesus "presented Himself alive...by many infallible proofs" to His disciples.

In verses 9-11 of our text, we have a reference to Jesus' first appearance, which was to Mary Magdalene. "Now when He rose early on the first day of the week..."—which was Sunday—"... He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe." Notice that they were mourning and weeping, and when the women told them they had seen Him, they didn't believe it. How sad that is. So the first unbelievers were His own followers. This event was also described in John 20.

A second appearance, which is my favorite, is in verses 12-13. It's a reference to, described in Luke 24, the two disciples on the road to Emmaus. "After that, He appeared in another form to two of them as they walked and went into the country. And they went and told it to the rest, but they did not believe them either."

These two disciples were returning to Emmaus the same afternoon of the Resurrection. They heard the rumors and reports that Jesus Christ had arisen, but they didn't believe it. Their hearts were sad and heavy. And as they walked along the road back to their home, Jesus showed up and walked along with them. The Bible says that their eyes were blinded, so they didn't know it was Jesus. He was coming incognito.

As they walked along, Jesus struck up a conversation with them. I wish I could have been there to hear it. Jesus basically asked them, "Why are you so sad? Why are you so discouraged?"

Cleopas, one of them, answered, "Are You the only stranger in Jerusalem, and have You not known the things which happened there in these days?" Jesus asked, "What things?" So they answered, "The things concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a Prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how the chief priests and our rulers delivered Him to be condemned to death, and crucified Him. But we were hoping that it was He who was going to redeem Israel."

They basically told Jesus that the women said they saw Him, but the two disciples didn't believe it. So their hopes were shattered. Yet they were speaking to Jesus about Jesus. They poured out their sad hearts to Jesus, so He gave them a Bible study about Himself, beginning in the law and the prophets and all the writings of Moses. He explained to them how Messiah would come and suffer and die. Then Jesus said, "O foolish ones..."—or "simple ones"—"...and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Ought not the Christ to have suffered these things and to enter into His glory?"

Then the two disciples came to Emmaus, and they asked Jesus to eat with them. Jesus went in with them, but they still didn't believe it was Jesus. They only knew He was a good Bible teacher; He had amazing insight. I wish it was recorded in the Bible for us. While sitting at the table, Jesus took the bread, blessed it and broke it. Then their eyes were opened and they realized it was Jesus. But at that moment He disappeared.

And I'm sure they said, "Oh, the stupid things we said in His presence!" Have you ever been in the presence of someone very important, you said dumb stuff and you didn't know it at the time? Afterwards you realized it and thought, I can't believe I said that!

After the disciples' eyes were opened they said, "Did not our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?" So it was the Word of God burning in their hearts.

Then these two disciples ran back to Jerusalem, which was a seven-mile journey, telling the others that they had seen the Lord. But the disciples there didn't believe them either.

About a third appearance, in our text in verse 14, Luke says that Jesus "appeared to the eleven as they sat at the table" at dinner. My guess is that Thomas was present at this time. "He rebuked their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they did not believe those who had seen Him after He had risen."

So in verse 10, "they mourned and wept." In verse 11, "They did not believe." In verse 13, "They did not believe." And in verse 14, They had "unbelief and hardness of heart...they did not believe those who had seen Him after He was risen."

Yet Jesus' post-Resurrection appearances were so powerful that He finally convinced His disciples that He was alive and risen. In Luke 24:39, He said, "Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have." He said to Thomas, in John 20:27, "Do not be unbelieving, but believing."

Eventually the disciples were changed. They were taken from fear to faith, from hopelessness to hope. Saul of Tarsus was changed. People today are being changed. Many people attending Easter services come because they have met the risen Savior. You know your life has been changed.

I was thinking about the transformation that happened in my life so many years ago. Christ came into my heart, and He changed me from the inside out. What a glorious truth that change is! 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

The third part of the message the angel gave is the invitation, verse 6. I like this. In the King James translation it says, "Behold the place where they laid Him." This is the part in the statement of the angel where we often miss it. In the Greek, the grammar used in this statement is very specific. It means "to look with understanding" or "to think deeply." The angel is inviting them to understand the implications, the ramifications, the results of the Resurrection.

The Resurrection is marvelous, but the real "rubber meets the road" result is the answer to the question, "So what?" You might say, "Okay, I'll buy that. Jesus rose from the dead. But so what?"

I'll give you a list. This could be a longer list, but I've narrowed it down to eight important things that resulted from the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

First, as to His person, everything Jesus said is true, and Jesus is the Son of God. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ set Himself up as the Son of God. If Jesus predicted His death and Resurrection—and He was crucified and rose from the dead—why not believe everything He said? Why not believe everything He said about Himself, about heaven, about hell, about life? Since it's all true, why not believe it? When Jesus said in John 14:6, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me," it's true. It may be narrow, but it's true.

The nature of truth is that it's exclusive. Anything other than that is not true, or it's a lie.

Jesus was the only one who came from heaven, born of a virgin, was the God-man, lived a sinless life, the only one to die on the Cross for man's sin, the only one who rose from the dead never to die again, the only one who ascended back into heaven and the only one who can save. There is only one Savior, Jesus Christ, the only way to get to heaven.

So as to His person, everything Jesus said is true. When He told Nicodemus, in John 3:7, "You must be born again," that means "You must be born again." No one can enter into the kingdom of God unless He is "born again." So we can trust Jesus. He must be the object of our faith.

The second result of the Resurrection was His pardon. So it wasn't just His person, but it also was His pardon. My sin can be forgiven. Without the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, we would have no assurance, no hope, no confidence that we would be forgiven of sin. Paul says in 1

Corinthians 15:17, "If Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" Since Christ is risen from the dead, our sins have been forgiven. The psalmist said in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us."

You can trust Jesus Christ today, as your Savior, to forgive all your sins. You will have a clean heart, be right with God, be ready to live and have no fear of life, death or eternity. It's because you know Christ as your Savior. He can dispel your fears. He can pardon your sins.

Have you been forgiven?

The third result is His power. In Philippians 3:10, Paul said, "...that I might know Him and the power of His resurrection...being conformed to His death." This is talking about living the resurrected life. It's about living in the power of His Resurrection. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead can dwell in you and give you the ability to live a life free of sin. You're not going to be sinless, but you will sin less and less. Galatians 5:16 says, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh."

If you are bound by some besetting sin, Jesus Christ can set you free of that. That's what results from the Resurrection. You can be free from the guilt of sin, and you can be free from the power of sin.

The fourth result of the Resurrection is His presence. In Hebrews 13:5, Jesus is quoted as saying, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." If you're a Christian, you're never alone. Jesus promised to be with us. He said in His great commission, in Matthew 28:20, "Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." You're never alone. That's why we sing,

"And He walks with me, and He talks with me,

And He tells me I am His own.

And the joy we share as we tarry there,

None other has ever known!"

It's to know Him as my Savior and friend. Everywhere I go, He is with me. I cannot be separated from Him.

Number five is His purpose. Life without God is empty. In Ecclesiastes 1:2, Solomon said, "Vanity of vanities. It's all vanity." He said that life under the sun without God has no purpose and no meaning. There is no significance, no fixed point without God. And what is to follow one's life? You're empty without God. But the Resurrection brings purpose and meaning—not only in this life but in the one to come.

The sixth result of the Resurrection is that we have His promise. Jesus said in John 14:1, "Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me." Then Jesus gave us His

promises in verses 2-3: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus went back to heaven and promised to prepare a place for us there.

If Jesus had not risen from the dead, what good would that promise be? A dead person can't save you, can't help you. Only a living Savior can save us and His promises be true. So when Jesus promised that He'll come back, I can bank on that promise. When He said He's going to prepare a place for us and come back for us, I can bank on His promise. Heaven is a real, prepared place.

Number seven—and this is one of my favorites—is His pattern. The Resurrection of Jesus Christ means that one day our bodies—even those of non-Christians—will be resurrected. Some bodies will be resurrected to life, and some will be resurrected to damnation. Every human being will be resurrected. There are two resurrections: the resurrection to life, and the resurrection to condemnation and judgment. In 1 Corinthians 15:20, Paul said, "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep."

The phrase "those who have fallen asleep" refers only to Christians who have died. And it is only referring to their physical bodies. Since sleep is a temporary state, it means that one day they will be awakened or resurrected.

You may say, "I don't like my body; I don't want it resurrected." Don't get freaked out, because it will be new and improved. You don't need plastic surgery; you just need the resurrection. I don't know anyone who is getting older who doesn't look forward to a new body. The Bible says our bodies are "tents." Mine is leaning and flapping in the wind. 2 Corinthians 5:1-2 says, "For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven."

Do you realize what the Resurrection of Jesus Christ means? It means that He is the prototype. When the Bible uses the words "first fruits," it refers to the first ingathering of the harvest, and there is more to follow. It's like a down payment. So Jesus is the prototype, the first human being in His humanity, dead in the grave and then He comes out in a new, glorified body. He's the same Jesus but now has an eternal body never to die again.

And one day we will also be resurrected. That's why Paul wrote to the believers in Thessalonica, in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, saying, "I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep....And the dead in Christ will rise first." He's referring to their physical bodies. "Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up..."—or "raptured"—"...together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in

the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” That’s the reunion in the air.

So there is resurrection, rapture and reunion. All of it is founded on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. And we Christians will have a new, resurrected body.

The last and eighth result of His Resurrection means His punishment. When Paul was preaching on Mars Hill in Athens, in Acts 17:31, he said, “He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” What Paul was saying is that as a result of God the Father raising Jesus from the dead, the Father said that all people will be raised from the dead, and unbelievers will stand in judgment before His Son.

This is also described in Revelation 20 where we see that at the end of time, all the wicked dead are resurrected, and there is “a great white throne” set in heaven. And on that throne sits Jesus Christ. All the books will be opened, and “Anyone not found written in the Book of Life [will be] cast into the lake of fire.” That actually is “the second death.” “The lake of fire” is what we know as “eternal hell.”

So the wicked dead come out of their graves, their bodies are reunited with their spirits and then they are judged, because their names weren’t found in the Book of Life. They didn’t trust in Jesus as Savior while on earth. They are thrown into “the lake of fire.” So Jesus Christ will sit on the throne judging the wicked dead.

You say, “I didn’t come to church on Easter Sunday to hear you preach about hell!”

I know you didn’t, but you’re hearing it. Because without the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, that’s our destiny. If Jesus Christ didn’t rise from the dead, then we all go to hell. Jesus died to save us. He died to rescue us. He died to reconcile us. All that is the result of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

That’s good news for the believer: Jesus did die and my sins can be forgiven. Because He rose from the dead I can have salvation, and I do not have to stand before the “great white throne” to be judged for my sins.

You ask, “What must I do to be forgiven? What must I do to go to heaven? What do I need to do about Jesus? What response should I have?”

There are three things to do. Number one, realize you are a sinner. The Bible says in Romans 3:10, “There is none righteous, no, not one.” Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”

Now granted, some are worse sinners than others, but we all are sinners. All it takes is one sin to qualify for the judgment of God. And we all are born as sinners, separated from God. And then in our lives we have committed sin and transgressed; we have willfully sinned and been disobedient to God. The Bible says, in Romans 6:23, that “The wages of sin is death,” and in

Ezekiel 18:20 it says, "The soul who sins shall die." So you need to realize that you're a sinner.

But what Jesus did when He died is that He died for you, in your place. He paid a debt He didn't owe. You owed a debt you couldn't pay.

Number two, you need to repent. The word "repent" simply means "to change your mind," and that results in a change of direction. So you do a 180; you're walking one way, you repent and turn and go the other way. You realize you're a sinner going to hell, so you need to repent and turn your life around.

Number three, you need to trust Jesus and receive Him as your Lord and Savior. Trust in or believe in or trust Jesus Christ as your Savior.

You ask, "That's all I have to do?"

Jesus did the work. He did it all. He paid the penalty for you. So we owe everything to Jesus Christ. But you must do your part: open the door of your heart to Him. He won't force Himself on you. You must of your own will and of your own volition say, "Christ, I believe in You. Jesus, I receive You. Jesus, I turn from my own way, from my stubborn will, from my sinful patterns of living, from my way of thinking. I turn and I receive You as my Savior."

Going to church won't get you to heaven. Being baptized won't get you to heaven. Being religious won't get you to heaven. Going to church on Easter Sunday won't get you to heaven. It's only by trusting Jesus Christ, by reaching out in faith, by putting your confidence in Him that will get you to heaven.

I'm going to give you an opportunity to receive Jesus Christ.

If you haven't trusted Jesus Christ as your Savior, 2 Corinthians 6:2 says, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation." Jesus said in Revelation 3:20, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me." He will come in and have fellowship with you. He can forgive your sins. You can be saved by trusting Him. "It's the gift of God," says Ephesians 4:8-9. Receive His free gift today.

If God has spoken to you through this message today, and you're not sure you're a child of God—maybe you don't know that if you died today, you would go to heaven, you've never really trusted Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior—I would like to lead you in a prayer right now inviting Christ to come into your heart and to be your Savior.

So as I pray this prayer, I want you to repeat it out loud, right where you are, after me. Make it from your heart, inviting Christ to come in and be your Lord and Savior. Let's pray.

"Dear Lord Jesus, I'm sorry for my sin. I pray that You'll forgive me and come into my heart and make me Your child. Fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to live for you all the days of my

life. I believe in You. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. In Jesus' name. Amen."

If you prayed that prayer and you meant it, God heard that prayer and God will and does forgive your sins.

We'd like to help you get started growing in your walk and relationship with Jesus Christ. God bless you.

If you just prayed with Pastor John to accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, we are so excited for you, and we'd like to send you a Bible and some resources to get you started in your relationship with the Lord. Simply click on the Contact link at the top of the page and tell us something like, "I prayed to accept Christ." We'll get your Bible and resources mailed out to you right away.

God bless you and welcome to the family of God.