

INTRODUCTION

When my girls were growing up, we had a tradition of an Easter afternoon egg hunt. When they were young, we’d hide hardboiled eggs we had decorated, but as they grew older they were less excited about hunting for boiled eggs, so I would hide some plastic eggs with candy and money in them—that kept their attention. I was such a great egg hider that each Easter there would be some eggs that were never found, and I couldn’t remember where I hid them either! Weeks later (on several occasions) I’d be mowing the grass and I’d accidentally mow over one of those hidden Easter eggs. Mowing over a three-month old boiled egg gives new meaning to the term “rotten egg.”

We all know about those kinds of Easter eggs, but if you’re a computer geek or a gamer, you know our computer culture has created a new kind of Easter egg. In computer lingo, an Easter egg is a file or code a programmer hidden in the software. For those geeks who know how to find them, computer Easter eggs can be fun too. For instance, in Microsoft Excel 97, you can punch in the coordinates X97 and L97, and then push shift/delete and suddenly your boring spread sheet changes into a screen full of mountain scenery that you can fly thorough using your mouse as a controller—that’s a computer Easter Egg. Hundreds of video games, DVDs, and software programs have hidden Easter eggs for the diligent to discover and enjoy.

Whether it’s boiled, chocolate, or a computer surprise, we all like finding something hidden. An Easter egg makes you say, “Wow! Look what I’ve found!” When you think about it, there have been some pretty amazing Easter eggs found throughout history. Some guy figured out how to use fire and said, “Wow, look what I’ve found!” When Columbus discovered he didn’t sail off the edge of the world, but landed on inhabited islands he must have surely thought, “Wow! Look what I’ve found.” When Marie Curie discovered radium, she knew she was onto something big. The invention of the telephone, airplane, and the internet all caused the creators to realize they were onto something that could change the world.

I believe the biggest Easter egg in history was when the disciples discovered the tomb of Jesus was empty. That discovery has had a greater impact on our lives than all of the other discoveries put together. This morning, I want to talk about the resurrection of Jesus. The title of the message is “Open Up Your Heart.” I’ve based this title on some words Paul wrote in 2 Corinthians 6. We’ve been studying 2 Corinthians for over a year now, and it is full of spiritual truth just waiting to be discovered.

2 Corinthians 6:3, “We put no stumbling block in anyone’s path, so that our ministry will not be discredited. Rather, as servants of God we commend ourselves in every way:”

Paul proceeds to list 36 different examples of how the Christian life is full of paradoxes. We’re going to skip these paradoxes for now, because I’ll be coming back to them in a future message. But for now I want us to focus on the words beginning in verse 11,

“We have spoken freely to you, Corinthians, and opened wide our hearts to you. We are not withholding our affection from you, but you are withholding yours from us. As a fair exchange—I speak as to my children—open wide your hearts also.”

I believe the best thing you can do this Easter is to simply open up your heart. Years ago, Stuart Hamblen, the movie-star-cowboy-turned-preacher wrote a song about this. “So let the sun shine in; face it with a grin. Smilers never lose and frowners never win. So let the sun shine in; face it with a grin; Open up your heart and let the sun shine in.” That’s great advice, but I want to talk to you about opening up your heart and letting the SON shine in! In this message, I want to encourage you to open up your heart to three life-changing realities.

1. OPEN YOUR HEART TO THE HISTORICAL TRUTH OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION

There are many miracles recorded in the Bible, but there is only ONE watershed miracle upon which the validity of everything else rises or falls. When you boil it all down, you are faced with this irrefutable conclusion: If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, then the story of Jesus is the cruelest hoax of history, and we’re all wasting our time today. However, if Jesus truly came back from the dead, then it is the greatest event of history. So, you have to decide, was the bodily resurrection of Jesus a miracle story concocted as a hoax by some Jewish fishermen, or did Jesus really rise from the grave? Not everyone believes in the resurrection of Jesus.

There’s a website called Yahoo Answers (<http://answers.yahoo.com/>) where people can post questions, and anyone can provide an answer. Someone recently posted this question: Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? The answers were pretty much divided 50/50 between those who said yes and those who said no. Someone using the screen name *tawaen*, *In a Handbasket* wrote: “Nope. I’ve never believed in zombie movies either.” Another posted under the name *oldernwiser*: “Nope. Dead is dead. Jesus was a good guy, but he’s dead now and has been dead for a good 2000 years. He is going to stay dead.” One of the yes answers was posted by *fanofchan*: “Yes! There were many eyewitness accounts ... and those people gave their lives for that truth. Would you give your life for a lie?”

What about you? How would you answer that question? “Do you believe in the resurrection of Jesus Christ? *Fanofchan* was correct, according to the Bible, there were many eyewitnesses of the resurrection. The Bible says, “He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.” (1 Corinthians 15:4-8) Have you ever noticed in addition to appearing to the disciples; Jesus also appeared to more than five hundred brothers? That’s a pretty solid group of eyewitnesses. Some critics have claimed the resurrection of Jesus was merely a hallucination. And, indeed, hallucinations do occur. I’ve had people tell me that after a loved one has died they’ll look up suddenly and think they catch a momentary glimpse of that person. That experience can be pretty spooky.

Some skeptics dismiss Jesus’ resurrection by saying after He was crucified and buried, the disciples loved Him so much they “wished” Him back into existence, but it was only a hallucination. But when you consider over 500 people saw the risen Christ at the same time, the hallucination theory doesn’t hold water.

Hallucinations are usually private experiences. During the 1960s and 1970s there were many “UFO” sightings, which gave birth to movies like “Close Encounters of the Third Kind.” There were probably several thousand people who claimed to have seen something in the sky they couldn’t identify, but there has never been a verified account of 500 people seeing a UFO at the same time. Or to put it another way, over 500 different people might claim they’ve had “Elvis sightings.” But these were all different individuals at various places and times. But there has never been a report of 500 people at the same time who saw Elvis, thank you very much.

Hallucinations are private, and momentary. Jesus appeared to over 500 people at once, and He appeared continually over a 40-day period. He wasn’t just floating around in a mist either; He did things like eat, talk, and even invited the disciples to touch Him. In Luke 24:39 Jesus said, “Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.”

Before Paul met Jesus, he had ridiculed and persecuted the people who claimed to have seen Jesus alive after the cross. But then when Jesus appeared to him on the road to Damascus, it only took a nanosecond for Paul to open his heart to the truth of the resurrection. These people were all eyewitnesses of the resurrection, and, of course, none of us have literally seen the actual resurrected body of Jesus. It requires faith on our part, but God rewards that kind of faith.

On that first Easter evening, the resurrected Christ appeared to the disciples without Thomas. Later when Thomas returned the other disciples said, “Thomas, the Lord was here!” Thomas was a skeptic like many people today, and he said, “Unless I put my fingers into the nail prints in His hands, and thrust my fist into the wound in His side, I don’t believe you.” Well, one week later, Jesus appeared again and Thomas was present. Jesus held out His nail-scarred hands and said, “Here they are, Thomas, go ahead and check out my wounds.” Thomas fell on his knees before Jesus and said, “My Lord and my God.” Then Jesus said, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen, and yet have believed.” (John 20:29)

I suspect there are some people whose hearts are so closed to the truth of the resurrection that if Jesus literally appeared in our midst right now, some would claim it was a hologram or done with smoke and mirrors. If you don’t believe by faith, I doubt you would believe if He stood before you with His wounded hands extended.

Have you opened your heart to the historical truth of the resurrection of Jesus? Notice, I said the “truth” of the resurrection, not the “fact” of the resurrection. Although the resurrection is a fact, it is so much more than a fact, it is truth. “Roses are red and violets are blue” that’s a fact, but facts don’t change your life—truth does. When you open your heart to the truth of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, it will change your life because you’ll have HOPE. So, next:

2. OPEN YOUR HEART TO THE FUTURE HOPE OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION

The resurrection of Jesus is so much more than just historical truth; it’s the basis of our future hope. Because of the resurrection of Jesus, we don’t have to be afraid of death. The Bible says we all have an appointment with death, and there’s nothing we can do to cancel or avoid that future appointment.

A few years ago, the Office of Social Services in Greenville, S.C. sent a form letter to people reading: “Your food stamps will be stopped, effective immediately because we received notice that you passed away. May God bless you. You may reapply if there is a change in your circumstances.” Dozens of those letters went out until someone pointed out how absurd they were. When you’re dead, there’s nothing you can do to change your circumstances! But because of the resurrection of Jesus, there’s something Jesus did to change our circumstances at death!

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians giving them instructions about how to react to the death of their Christian family members and friends. He wrote that he didn’t want them to “sorrow as others who have no hope.” When we experience grief, we sorrow, but it’s a sorrow infused with HOPE, because Jesus lives, we too, shall live. But Paul was correct in observing there are many people who sorrow and they have no hope.

Woody Allen is a funny actor and director, but he doesn’t believe in God. He says he vacillates between being an atheist and an agnostic. A few years ago he spoke about facing death, and his one-liner has become rather famous. But the humorous line is taken out of context. Here’s the full context of what he said about facing death. “The fundamental thing behind all activity is the constant struggle against annihilation and death. It’s absolutely stupefying in its terror ... (and then he gives this zinger) It’s not that I’m afraid to die. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.” (*Esquire Magazine*, May, 1977) For a person who doesn’t have faith in Jesus Christ, death *should* be a horrifying prospect—as Allen says, “absolutely stupefying in its terror.” But for those who have opened their hearts to the hope of the resurrection, death isn’t something fear. We spend every day with the knowledge that our own death and resurrection is closer every hour of every day. The resurrection of Jesus gives us HOPE. Remember, my acrostic for HOPE is Having Only Positive Expectations. The Bible says, “If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.” In other words, if we don’t have any hope for the future, we are a bunch of pitiful, deceived worshippers. But we have future hope because the Bible says: “we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus.” (1 Corinthians 15:19; 2 Corinthians 4:14)

As Christians we have HOPE for the future. In a Peanuts cartoon, Lucy and Linus are watching television when Lucy says to Linus, “Go get me a glass of water.” Linus was a little angry and said, “Why should I do something for you? You never do anything for me!” Lucy says, “On your 75th birthday I’ll bake you a cake.” Linus gets up and goes to the kitchen and says, “Life is so much more pleasant when you have something to look forward to.” I agree! And for a child of God we have something to look forward to!

When I was growing up, Steve McQueen was one of my favorite actors. He starred in movies like “The Great Escape” and “The Magnificent Seven.” He lived a pretty rough life, and in his late forties he was diagnosed with a rare form of lung cancer. As he began to take stock of his life and impending death, he attended a Billy Graham crusade, and at the end of the week, gave his heart to Jesus. He was still having trouble believing God could give eternal life to a rotten sinner like him, so he requested a meeting with Billy Graham personally. Billy was able to spend a couple of hours with Steve, and he shared a verse from Titus 1:2 which says, “a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.” Steve asked for a pen to write that verse down, but instead, Billy Graham

gave him his Bible. Not long after that meeting Steve traveled to Mexico to receive an experimental treatment for his cancer but while there, on November 7, 1980, at age 50, Steve McQueen died—but that wasn’t the end of Steve McQueen. They found his Bible in his hands open to Titus 1:2 with his finger laid on top of the verse that verse. Can you face death without fear? Have you opened your heart to the future hope found in Jesus’ resurrection?

3. OPEN YOUR HEART TO THE PRESENT POWER OF JESUS’ RESURRECTION

The historical truth of the resurrection is amazing, and the future hope of the resurrection is comforting, but there’s MORE! Right now, you can experience the present power of Jesus’ resurrection. The Christian life is NOT about believing doctrine, following rules, or performing rituals, it’s about enjoying a personal relationship with Jesus.

The Bible says, “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection...we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.” (Philippians 3:10; 2 Corinthians 4:7)

In today’s pluralistic culture, it’s popular to say there are many ways to get to heaven. It’s certainly not politically correct to say Jesus is the only way to God. Almost everyone loves Oprah Winfrey because of all the good deeds she performs. But when it comes to spiritual matters, you probably don’t want Oprah to be your guide. She said: “One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe that there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God.” (“The Church of O,” *Christianity Today*, April 1, 2002). Excuse me, but Jesus never said, “I am A way, A truth, A life.” He said, “I am THE way, THE truth, and THE life.” Then He had the audacity to say, “No one comes to the Father except by me.” (John 14:6)

The main reason you need to believe in the Resurrection of Jesus is so you can have a relationship with Him. You can’t have a relationship with a dead person. I believe George Washington was the first president of the U.S., but I can’t have a personal relationship with Him, because he’s dead and buried in Mt. Vernon, Virginia.

That’s what makes Jesus unique from any other individual in history. You can visit the grave of George Washington. You can even visit the tomb of Buddha. And each year, thousands of Muslims visit the tomb of Mohammed in Medina. No Buddhist talks about knowing Buddha. No Muslim talks about having a personal relationship with Mohammed. But the Christian life is ALL about knowing Jesus and living a life that displays HIS resurrection power.

This resurrection power is available to you right now. One of my mentors was the great pastor Ray Stedman. In his classic book, *Body Life*, he writes: “We must understand that resurrection power is like no other power on earth. It works when everything around it is dull, dead and barren. It works best in the midst of a cemetery, for that is where it was first demonstrated. When Jesus Christ was resurrected he came out from among the dead. Therefore, if you learn to live by resurrection power you can be alive and vital when everything and everyone around you is dead and lifeless.” (*Body Life*, p. 64)

The way to experience resurrection power is to invite Jesus to live in your heart. It’s so simple that even a child can understand the concept of inviting Jesus to live in their heart. I heard about a pediatrician who was examining a little 7-year-old girl. He put a stethoscope to her heart and asked, “Do you think I’ll hear Barney in there?” She looked at him as if all adults are dumb and said, “No. Jesus is in my heart. Barney’s just on my underpants!”

In Revelation 3:20 Jesus said, “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock.” He’s talking about the door to your heart “If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.” The great English artist, Holman Hunt, painted a picture called “the Light of World.” It’s a dark picture in which Jesus can be seen holding a lantern knocking on a door. An art critic pointed out to Holman Hunt that he had made a mistake because there was no doorknob on the outside of the door. Mr. Hunt said, “No, it’s not a mistake. That represents a door to a person’s heart. There’s no doorknob on the outside because Jesus will never force His way into your heart. The doorknob is on the inside, and each person must be willing to open up their heart to Jesus. Have you done that?”

CONCLUSION

It doesn’t matter what you’ve done in your past, Jesus wants you to open up your heart and let Him come in and forgive your sins and make you a new person. I love to hear stories about how the resurrection power of Jesus continues to change people’s lives, even those who seem to be unlikely candidates. If you’re an old heavy metal rocker, you might recall the group Iron Maiden from the 1980s. The drummer was Nicko McBrain—doesn’t “Nicko” sound like a rocker’s name? Like so many successful rock groups, Iron Maiden toured and sold millions of albums. Nicko and the other band members had all the drugs, booze, and fame they could handle—in fact, they had *more* than they could handle. Nicko enjoyed the lifestyle of riding in limousines and living in the most lavish hotel suites around the world. But like many others in the same situation, Nicko discovered the money, booze, drugs and groupies didn’t give him any lasting satisfaction.

A couple of years ago while Iron Maiden was touring, Nicko’s wife, Rebecca, decided to stay home with their son in Boca Raton, Florida. She quickly became friends with her neighbor who invited her and her son to attend church with them. She had many questions, and this neighbor patiently answered her questions and ended up leading Rebecca to faith in Jesus Christ.

A few weeks later, Rebecca started asking Nicko to attend Spanish River Community Church with her and their son. Nicko refused at first, but didn’t completely rule out the idea. On one Easter Sunday morning, Rebecca invited him again. Nicko wanted to sleep in, because he was exhausted from a recent tour. He told his wife, “You go alone, I’m just too tired.” Rebecca said, “Well, if you won’t go for yourself today, at least go for our son.” Nicko rolled over, but he couldn’t go back to sleep, so he got up and prepared to go to church (and unknown to him) for a rendezvous with God.

In Nicko’s own words he writes, “I can’t remember what it was, but right in the middle of one of the songs, I started crying my eyes out. I just stood there saying, ‘What’s the matter with me?’ I didn’t even drink last night.”

At the end of the message, the pastor asked everyone to stand for the closing prayer and Nicko couldn't stand up. And during that prayer Nicko came face to face with His Creator, and in that moment he opened his heart to Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ has changed his life, and Nicko is now a committed follower of Jesus Christ, and every Sunday when he's home, Nicko McBrain, the drummer for Iron Maiden, now plays percussion for the worship band for his church.

I still insist the greatest proof of the Resurrection of Jesus isn't an empty tomb, or 500 eyewitnesses. The greatest proof of the resurrection is a changed life. I don't have to talk about Paul's changed life, or Nicko's changed life. I stand before you today as a man who has been changed because Jesus is alive in me. “He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today! He walks with me and talks with me along the narrow way. He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart; You ask me how I know He lives? He lives within my heart!” Will you open up your heart to Jesus today?

OUTLINE

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes