

Rev. Dr. Chris Montovino  
Instructor's Name  
April 5, 2026

### He is Risen Indeed

I remember my first brush with death. I was a little kid, maybe 8 or 9 visiting my grandparents, when a distant relative died. For some reason, my grandmother thought, well this would be a good life lesson for Chris. So why don't I take him with me to the viewing at the local funeral home?

I can still remember the setting. People lined up to greet the widow at the head of the casket, stopped to look at the dead man, made some odd comments about how good he looked, and then proceeded into the other room for punch and cookies. It seemed so surreal and strange. When it was our turn, my grandmother had me firm in hand. There was no turning back. I was going to see death!

At my height, I was at just the right eye level with the casket and so I could see him up close and personal. What if he sat up and looked at me? What if he said something? Do dead people really come back to life? All of these questions swirled in my head.

I'm pretty sure I had nightmares for the rest of my time there.

I hate to be the bearer of bad news, but the World Death Report recently published some grim statistics. The human death rate stands at 100%. Folks, none of us are going to make it out of this life alive. We will all end up either in a box in the ground or up on someone's mantle.

That is at least what humans have thought ever since Adam and Eve's fall from grace and experience with death.

Today's scripture tells us a different ending to the human death narrative with the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now if you had a truly unbelievable story that could change the way that humans approached death throughout eternity, you'd want to be darn certain that the eye witnesses were utterly reliable and their details were absolutely correct. Right?

And yet, that is not how God thinks. You see, God's ways are not our ways. God's thoughts are not our thoughts. They are so much higher!<sup>1</sup>

Nobody in the first century would have imagined a story of Jesus' resurrection where the first eye witnesses were women. Back then, women weren't culturally considered credible witnesses. And yet in each of the four gospels that recount this miraculous event, the disciples who showed up early in the morning to anoint Jesus' body and discovered that he wasn't there, were women. Women were the first apologists. How awesome is that!

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<sup>1</sup> Isaiah 55:9

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Join me as we read from Luke 24:1-12 and we hear this story through Luke's eyes.

It was very early in the morning on the first day of the week. The women took the spices they had prepared. Then they went to the tomb. **2** They found the stone rolled away from it. **3** When they entered the tomb, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. **4** They were wondering about this. Suddenly two men in clothes as bright as lightning stood beside them. **5** The women were terrified. They bowed down with their faces to the ground. Then the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? **6** Jesus is not here! He has risen! Remember how he told you he would rise. It was while he was still with you in Galilee. **7** He said, 'The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful people. He must be nailed to a cross. On the third day he will rise from the dead.' " **8** Then the women remembered Jesus' words.

**9** They came back from the tomb. They told all these things to the eleven apostles and to all the others. **10** Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them were the ones who told the apostles. **11** But the apostles did not believe the women. Their words didn't make any sense to them. **12** But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent over and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. Then he went away, wondering what had happened.

Let us pray. Prayer of Illumination.

"Author and pastor John Ortberg told the true story of a friend who used to work for a church in Minnesota. One of his jobs was to travel to rural communities where they didn't have churches for funerals. He would go out with an undertaker, and they would drive together in the undertaker's hearse. One time, when they were on their way back from a funeral, John's friend got tired. He decided to lie down and take a nap... in the back of the hearse.

The undertaker pulled the hearse into a gas station to fuel up. As the station attendant was filling up the hearse, he was kind of freaked out to see a body stretched out in the back. It was about that time when John's friend woke up, opened his eyes, knocked on the window and waved at the attendant.

Never had he seen anybody run so fast in his whole life.

Ortberg added, 'When people see life where they were expecting death, they start running. [Just as with our story today], on the third day, when everything changed! Where everybody thought they were just going to see death, there was life! And that shook things up! After the third day, as a matter of historical record,

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his followers, who were shattered, disillusioned, and heartsick following the Crucifixion, faced all kinds of difficulties and suffering and imprisonment and spread the word, because they believed they had seen life where they were expecting death. That shakes people up!”<sup>2</sup>

As I reflected on this story today, there are several things I'd like to lift up. What was the significance of it being the first day of the week? What were the responses of each of the people arriving at the tomb that day? What evidence do we have that this story is even true? Where do we find ourselves in the story? What are the common beliefs about life after death today? What would shake us up if we truly believed in life after life after death?

Each of the four gospel writers agree that, “On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took spices they had prepared and went to the tomb.” Early on the first day of the week. Jesus was crucified and died on Friday. His body was taken down and placed in a borrowed tomb before sundown on that same day as it was the start of the Jewish Sabbath.

Then from Friday evening sundown to Saturday evening sundown, they rested, because that is what God commanded them to do on the Sabbath. Even important work like anointing and preparing Jesus' body for burial would have to wait until the Sabbath was over on the first day of the week.

But...I think this time indicates something even more profound.

In Genesis, the very first book of the Bible with the story of creation, we hear that for the first five days, God created everything that we see, the moon, the stars, the earth, the trees, the animals of the land, fish of the sea, and birds of the air. On the sixth day, God created the first humans. But then on the seventh day, God rested from this creative work. Not because God was tired, but because God wanted to set an example for us humans who must rest from our constant productivity.

This was God's act of creation.

In our story today, we see God's act of re-creation.

On Palm Sunday, just a week ago, on the first day of that week, we heard how Jesus was hailed as the new King as he rode into Jerusalem. On Maundy Thursday, everything started to unravel when the same people changed their cry to “Crucify him, Crucify him!” By Friday, Jesus was crucified, dead, and buried in a borrowed tomb. On Holy Saturday, yesterday, Jesus, himself, rested in the tomb. But on that first Easter morning, the first day of the week, God's work continued as Jesus rose from the dead, as part of a new creation. The old order of creation had

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<sup>2</sup> John Ortberg, “The Empty Tomb: How Will You Respond?” Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

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gone, and the new order come. Where Jesus would be King and Lord over everything in heaven and earth.

We will come back to that in just a moment.

But what were the responses of each of the witnesses at the tomb that morning?

The women, Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others were clearly grieving and perplexed. They had gone with spices to anoint and prepare Jesus' body for the proper burial that they had run out of time for on Friday. When they saw the three thousand pound grave stone rolled away and the tomb empty, we are told that they were wondering. The Greek word for wondering is *aporeo*. It means to be perplexed, at a mental loss, unable to put all the pieces together.

We are also told that they were terrified. The Greek word for terrified is *emphobos*. It means to be frozen in fear, terrified, much alarmed.

Imagine being at the graveside of a loved one watching the undertaker lower the casket down in the concrete vault, sealing the lid upon it, and then filling the hole in with dirt. I would bet that if we returned a day or two later and saw the grave dug up, the vault and casket open, and the body missing, that we would be wondering and terrified too. *Aporeo*. *Emphobos*.

"What in the heck?" We would demand.

Then there are the two men, angels, who suddenly appear out of nowhere, adding to their confusion. They are the ones who remind the women what Jesus himself had told them about his resurrection while he was still with them. They helped them put together the pieces of the puzzle.

They said, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here; he has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee? The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again."

These angels were there to speak truth into the hearts when their minds were a mush with grief.

Then there are the Eleven apostles and all the others who were huddled together in fear that they could be next crucified. The women ran back to tell them what they had witnessed. Their story was impossible. A three thousand pound stone does not roll away by itself. Their story was mysterious. There was no logical answer for what had happened and how Jesus' body was missing. Their story was supernatural. Angels don't just appear out of nowhere.

The Eleven did not believe the women and considered their words to be absurd nonsense.

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The Greek word for did not believe was *apisteo*. It means that they refused to believe, doubted the women, and weren't willing to be persuaded. It has an element of faith involve with it. They weren't willing to believe the words that Jesus himself had told them earlier.

The Greek word for nonsense is *leros*. It means folly, foolishness, or idle chatter. This speaks to the cultural misunderstanding back then that men considered the women less than credible eye witnesses of what they saw.

Notice how the Eleven did nothing at first with this story. They were frozen with disbelief.

Luke tells us that only Peter, responded appropriately. He got up and ran to the tomb. Notice the difference from the other Eleven in his response to the women's testimony.

Arriving at the tomb, he bent over, saw the evidence, with strips of linen that had previously covered Jesus, lying there all by themselves.

Peter went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

The Greek word for wonder used here is different from the one used to describe the women. This is *thaumazeo*. It means to marvel, be amazed, or astonished out of one's senses. Curious.

"Wow! What in the world?"

Curiosity is the beginning of faith. If you're ever part of a church that does not welcome honest questioning...run! Questions lead to more honest faith!

What evidence do we have that story could even be true?

First, we have the four gospels accounts. Different details, each leading to the same conclusion. Jesus was raised from the dead. We would never expect four witnesses of a trial to remember the same event exactly alike. But through their testimonies, the jury decides, do their stories reconcile with one another to create an overall story of what took place? These four accounts do.

Second, Jesus tomb was empty and no one has ever able to produce his body to disprove it.

Third, scripture attests to over five hundred eye witnesses who encountered Jesus after his resurrection, telling us that he indeed was alive after being dead for three days.

Fourth, we see how the disciples were transformed from being a frozen disbelieving, timid, shy lot, into bold evangelists of the truth who put their lives on the line for it and went out to tell the world about it.

Fifth, we have the writings of Josephus a Jewish historian who lived during the time of Christ and the destruction of Jerusalem in 70AD. Even Josephus spoke about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

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And sixth, there are billions upon billions of believers worldwide from every nation, language, and tribe who have put their faith in Christ ever since.

How could this story not be true?

But where do we find ourselves in the story today?

Are we like the grieving women, who are grappling with their loss and uncertain what to do or believe? Could we find peace amidst our grief, knowing that what belongs to God will return to God one day?

Are we like the angels who's job it is to proclaim to the truth of Jesus' resurrection, but not force it upon anyone? Could we be boldly believe that whenever God's word goes forth, it always takes root and produces fruit that God intended, in God's time and God's way.

Are we like the disciples, the ones who faithfully followed Jesus, but who wanted rational proof that Jesus had really risen from the dead? Could we rest from our questioning, take a leap of faith and trust that God will sort out all of the details even if it goes beyond the realm of our rational human understanding?

Are we like Peter, who was curious, who saw the facts and wondered in faith what it all could mean? Could we believe that all we need is faith as a small mustard seed? Could we offer that faith to God and let it grow into tree of new life?

Are we like the innocent bystanders at the tomb, who didn't have any religious background or cultural understanding what all of this meant? What is all this talk about dead people coming back to life? Could we be open that maybe our being here this morning is not a mistake but that it was God's invitation to hear this Good News? What Good News?

That Jesus has conquered sin and death.

That because of him we have forgiveness for our sins.

That we have the hope of life after life after death.

That we are participants in Jesus' new creation and that we have important work to do of bringing heaven to earth until Jesus returns.

And that whenever we experience something beautiful, or good, or true in or through or among us...we are witnessing the in-breaking of Jesus' reign right here on earth as it is in heaven.

So what is a proper Christian belief of the resurrection and how ought that inform the way we talk about life after death? Or life after life after death? What would shake us up if we truly believed in that?

Anglican Theologian NT Wright in his book, *Surprised by Hope: Rethinking Heaven, the Resurrection, and the Mission of the Church*, argues that the Modern Western Church has abandoned a truly biblical Christian belief in the bodily

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resurrection and new creation. Instead, it has replaced it with a Platonic escapist view of the soul simply leaving the body upon death and going to heaven. Wright states that this is a distortion of what had been professed in the Church for our first eighteen hundred years. And it was during the Enlightenment that Platonism crept back into people's belief.

So what is a correct view of the resurrection that Wright attests?

He calls it life after life after death.

In other words, upon death, when our bodies are planted in the ground, there is a sort of Paradise or heavenly waiting for those in Christ. Jesus himself spoke of this as he hung upon the cross with two thieves crucified at his sides.

One thief hurled insults at him.

But the other said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And Jesus responded, "I tell you the truth, today, you will be with me in paradise."<sup>3</sup>

The Greek word that Jesus used to describe this existence waiting for believing people upon death was *paradiseo*. It was also an ancient Persian word that meant enclosure, garden, or park...a futuristic Eden of a sorts, harkening back to the Garden of Eden at the beginning of the creation. This is the life after death that Jesus himself says awaits us.

But then what do we do with this idea of the resurrection from the dead? Or what N.T. Wright calls our true Christian hope of life after life after death. This is the New Creation that we hear Jesus inaugurated on Easter morning.

He had a new body, one that had substance and form. That was wholly recognizable. That was touchable. That still bore it's scars. That could eat and drink. And yet walk through doors. It's all kind of mind boggling.

This is what we who are still alive hope for in the New Creation and for what those who in Christ have died wait patiently and blissfully for in paradise. Scripture tells us that at sometime, Christ will return and the dead will arise, and in the twinkling of an eye we will be changed, given brand new bodies.<sup>4</sup> Bodies that we will know, and hug, and kiss, and be present with once again. This is the New Creation that has come in Jesus and is coming when Jesus returns.

The Apostle Paul proclaimed, "When the perishable body has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true, "Death has been swallowed up in victory."

"Where, O death, is your victory?"

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<sup>3</sup> Luke 23:42-43

<sup>4</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

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Where, O death, is your sting?

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us victory over the grave through our Lord Jesus Christ!" Amen!

But until then, we live in this in-between time of Jesus' resurrection and his returning. A time during which N.T. Wright says that we in the Church have some work to do. My friends, what we Christians do today matters! How we live our lives matter! The Church's mission is to work for justice, to fight on behalf of the vulnerable, the orphan, the widow, and the alien in our borders; to bring beauty where there once was ugliness, and renewal where there once was despair, life where there was only death; to be a people of love, hope, and peace; all signs that God's kingdom has indeed come on earth as it is in heaven!

You know in some senses, it would have been easier if Jesus were still dead in the tomb. That would be far less threatening. But if he still alive, and on the loose in our world, then he is a force to be reckoned with today. He will sort things out and he will bring to justice to those who have done wrong and he will bring peace to our earth.

N.T. Wright said: "Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from earth but to colonize earth with the life of heaven."<sup>5</sup> Are we being the life of heaven in the places where we've been planted?

The Apostle Paul said, "If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come."<sup>6</sup>

In Christ, we have a new identity. Being in Christ means that our identity is found in him and not in our past actions, sins, failures, or fears.

In Christ, the old is gone. Our former sinful habits, legalism, and the power of sin have been broken.

In Christ, the new has come. Our new life emerges with a new heart, a new mind, new desires, and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like a caterpillar going through metamorphosis which changes into a butterfly. So we undergo a process of continual transformation by the Holy Spirit as we become more and more like Jesus Christ.

At his good friend Lazarus' grave, Jesus told Lazarus' grieving sisters, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though

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<sup>5</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt* (Good Book Company, 2020) pp. 137-138

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

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they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this," he asked."<sup>7</sup>

Do we believe this?

I want to close with a story that "Max Lucado told of a missionary in Brazil who discovered a tribe of natives in a remote part of the jungle. They lived near a large river. The tribe was in need of medical attention because a contagious disease was ravaging the population. People were dying daily.

A hospital was not too terribly far away—across the river, but the natives would not cross it because they believed it was inhabited by evil spirits. They believed that to enter the water would mean certain death. The missionary explained how he had crossed the river and was unharmed. But they were not impressed.

He then took them to the bank and placed his hand in the water. They still wouldn't go in. He walked into the water up to his waist and splashed water on his face. It didn't matter. They were still afraid to enter the river.

Finally, he dove into the river, swam beneath the surface until he emerged on the other side. He punched a triumphant fist into the air. He had entered the water and escaped. It was then that the natives broke out into a cheer and followed him across.

My friends, that's exactly what Jesus did for us! He entered the river of death and came out on the other side. No wonder we celebrate the Resurrection!<sup>8</sup>

So may we have hope knowing there is life after life after death. May believe that Jesus' resurrection has real implications for how we live life today and that the Church is to be a revolutionary force for good in our present world. And may we believe that because Jesus lives, we shall also."<sup>9</sup>

He is risen! He is risen, indeed!

Amen!

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<sup>7</sup> John 11:25-26

<sup>8</sup> Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday: Living in the Power of the Cross* (Thomas Nelson, 2019 reprint), pp. 126-127

<sup>9</sup> John 14:19

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He is Risen Indeed! (Edited preached version)

I remember my first brush with death.

I was about eight or nine, visiting my grandparents, when a distant relative died. For some reason, my grandmother decided this would be a good life lesson—if I went with her to the viewing at the funeral home.

I can still see it. People lined up, greeted the widow, paused at the casket, said how “good” he looked, and then moved on for punch and cookies. It all felt surreal... almost disconnected from reality.

When it was our turn, my grandmother had me firmly by the hand. There was no turning back. I was going to see death.

At just the right height, I peered into the casket. And my mind started racing. What if he sat up? What if he said something? Do dead people come back?

I'm pretty sure I had nightmares the rest of that trip.

Here's the hard truth: the human death rate is still 100%. None of us are getting out of this life alive. That's the story humanity has told ever since the fall.

But today's scripture tells a different ending.

Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything about how we understand life and death.

Now think about this. If you were going to tell a story so unbelievable that it would reshape how humanity thinks about life and death forever—you'd make sure your witnesses were airtight, right?

And yet, that's not how God works.<sup>10</sup>

In the first century, women were not considered reliable witnesses in court. And yet, in every single Gospel, the first witnesses to the resurrection are women.

That's not an accident. That's grace. That's God saying, “My kingdom doesn't work the way yours does.”

So let's listen to Luke's account.

It was very early in the morning on the first day of the week. The women took the spices they had prepared. Then they went to the tomb. **2** They found the stone rolled away from it. **3** When they entered the tomb, they did not find the body of

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<sup>10</sup> Isaiah 55:9

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the Lord Jesus. **4** They were wondering about this. Suddenly two men in clothes as bright as lightning stood beside them. **5** The women were terrified. They bowed down with their faces to the ground. Then the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? **6** Jesus is not here! He has risen! Remember how he told you he would rise. It was while he was still with you in Galilee. **7** He said, ‘The Son of Man must be handed over to sinful people. He must be nailed to a cross. On the third day he will rise from the dead.’” **8** Then the women remembered Jesus’ words.

**9** They came back from the tomb. They told all these things to the eleven apostles and to all the others. **10** Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them were the ones who told the apostles. **11** But the apostles did not believe the women. Their words didn’t make any sense to them. **12** But Peter got up and ran to the tomb. He bent over and saw the strips of linen lying by themselves. Then he went away, wondering what had happened.

Let us pray...

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There’s a story told by John Ortberg about a friend who used to ride in a hearse to rural funerals. One day, on the way home, he climbed into the back and took a nap.

They stopped for gas. The attendant looked in—and saw a body lying there. Right about that time, the “body” woke up, knocked on the glass, and waved. Ortberg said his friend had never seen anyone run so fast.

And then he added this: when people see life where they expected death... they start running.<sup>11</sup>

That’s Easter.

The women went to the tomb expecting death. They brought spices. They came to finish a burial. Instead, they found an empty tomb.

Luke tells us they were wondering. The Greek word for wondering is *aporeo*. It means to be perplexed, at a mental loss, unable to put all the pieces together. And they were terrified. The Greek word for terrified is *emphobos*. It means to be frozen in fear, terrified, much alarmed. “Oh my God, what has happened here?”

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<sup>11</sup> John Ortberg, “The Empty Tomb: How Will You Respond?” Menlo Park Presbyterian Church

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That makes sense, doesn't it?

Imagine going to a graveside a few days after a burial... and finding the grave dug up, the casket empty. You wouldn't shrug that off. You'd be shaken.

And then—angels appear who speak truth into their confusion: “Why do you look for the living among the dead? He is not here. He has risen.”

In other words: you're looking in the wrong place.

Then the women run back to tell the disciples.

And what do the disciples do?

They dismiss it. Luke says they thought it was nonsense. The Greek word for did not believe was *apisteo*. It means that they refused to believe, doubted the women, and weren't willing to be persuaded. It has an element of faith involve with it. They weren't willing to believe the words that Jesus himself had told them earlier about his resurrection.

They don't move. They don't investigate. They're stuck in their disbelief. Yeah, the disciples.

Except for Peter.

Peter runs.

He doesn't have it all figured out. He doesn't fully believe yet. But he's curious enough to go and see.

And Luke tells us he leaves the tomb wondering. The Greek word for wonder used here is different from the one used to describe the women. This is *thaumazeo*. It means to marvel, be amazed, or astonished out of one's senses. Curious. Trying to piece it together.

“Wow! What in the world?”

That's important.

Because for many of us, that's where faith begins—not with certainty, but with curiosity, maybe even doubt. Our God welcomes even the hardest honest questions.

So let me ask you: where are you in this story?

Are you like the women—grieving, carrying loss, trying to make sense of life?

Are you like the disciples—perhaps you spent your whole life in the Church and yet you're skeptical, needing proof, unwilling to believe something that sounds too good to be true?

Or are you like Peter—curious enough to take a step, even if you don't have all the answers?

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Because Easter meets us in all of those places.

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Now there's another detail we can't miss.

Luke tells us this all happened "on the first day of the week, very early in the morning."

That's not just a time stamp. That's theology.

In Genesis, God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh.

But here—on the first day of a new week—God is doing something again.

Not just creation... but re-creation.

Think about the timeline.

On Friday, Jesus is crucified.

On Saturday, he rests in the tomb.

And on Sunday—the first day of the week—he rises again.

This is the beginning of a new creation.

The old order—sin, death, decay—is being overturned. Something new has begun.

That's what Easter is.

Not just resuscitation. Not just "coming back."

It's the launch of a whole new world.

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Now some people ask, "Is there any reason to believe this is actually true?"

That's a fair question.

And Christianity has never been afraid of that question.

We have four Gospel accounts—different perspectives, same core claim: the tomb was empty, and Jesus was alive.

We have the simple fact that no one ever produced Jesus' body as evidence that he didn't come back to life.

We have the writings of Josephus a Jewish historian who lived during Jesus' life who spoke about his life, death, and resurrection.

We have the transformation of the disciples—from fearful and hiding to bold and willing to suffer and die for what they had seen.

We have early testimony of hundreds who encountered the risen Christ.

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And finally, there are billions upon billions of believers worldwide from every nation, language, and tribe who have put their faith in Christ ever since.  
My friends something historical happened that day.

The question is: what do we do with it?

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Because here's the real question of Easter: not just "Did it happen?" but "What does it mean?"  
And this is where we need to be careful.

A lot of us have been taught that the goal of Christianity is to "go to heaven when we die."

But that's not the full picture.

The New Testament speaks of something bigger.

Theologian N.T. Wright calls it "life after life after death."

In other words, upon death, when our bodies are planted in the ground, there is a sort of Paradise or heavenly waiting for those in Christ. Jesus himself spoke of this as he hung upon the cross with two thieves crucified at his sides.

One thief hurled insults at him.

But the other said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."

And Jesus responded, "I tell you the truth, today, you will be with me in paradise."<sup>12</sup>

The Greek word that Jesus used to describe this existence waiting for believing people upon death was *paradiseo*. It was also an ancient Persian word that meant enclosure, garden, or park...a futuristic Garden of Eden like that at the beginning of the creation. This is the life after death that Jesus himself says awaits those who believe in him.

But then what do we do with this idea of the resurrection from the dead? Or what N.T. Wright calls our true Christian hope of life after life after death. This is the New Creation that we hear Jesus inaugurated on Easter morning.

In other words, yes—there is life after death. Jesus speaks of paradise, a real presence with God.

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<sup>12</sup> Luke 23:42-43

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But that's not the end of the story.

The ultimate hope of Christianity is resurrection. New creation. God renewing heaven and earth.

Jesus didn't just escape death—he defeated it.

He rose with a real body. Recognizable. Touchable. Still bearing scars—and yet transformed.

And scripture tells us that one day, in the twinkling of an eye, at the trumpet sound, God will do the same for all creation.

That death itself will be undone.

As the Apostle Paul says, “Death has been swallowed up in victory.”<sup>13</sup>

Thanks be to God.

That's our hope. Amen!

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But here's where it gets practical.

N.T. Wright said: “Jesus' resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from earth but to colonize earth with the life of heaven.”<sup>14</sup>

The Apostle Paul said, “If anyone is in Christ, they are a new creation. The old has gone and the new has come.”<sup>15</sup>

In Christ, we have a new identity. Being in Christ means that our identity is found in him and not in our past actions, our sins, our successes, our failures, or our fears.

In Christ, the old is gone. Our former habits, legalism, and the power of sin have been broken.

In Christ, the new has come. Our new life emerges with a new heart, a new mind, new desires, and filled with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Like a caterpillar undergoing metamorphosis changes into a butterfly. So we undergo a process of continual transformation by the Holy Spirit as we become more and more like Jesus Christ.

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<sup>13</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

<sup>14</sup> Rebecca Manley Pippert, *Stay Salt* (Good Book Company, 2020) pp. 137-138

<sup>15</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:17

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If resurrection is true—if new creation has already begun—then what we do now matters.

We are not just waiting to leave this world.  
We are called to participate in what God is doing in it.  
To bring love where there is hate.  
Beauty where there is brokenness.

Hope where there is despair.  
Justice where there is injustice.  
Every act of compassion, every act of mercy, every act of truth—it all matters.  
Because it's a sign of God's new creation breaking in.  
Beloved, are we being the those signs of God's new creation in the places where we've been planted? Our homes? Our work places? Our schools? Our neighborhoods? Our country? Our world?

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And let's be honest.  
It would actually be easier if Jesus stayed dead in the tomb.  
Less disruptive. Less demanding.  
But if he's alive...  
then he's not just a figure of the past but a force to be reckoned.

He's Lord of the present.  
And that means our lives are not our own.  
It means he calls us to something.

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Jesus once stood at a grave—his friend Lazarus—and said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me will live, even though they die.”

And then he asked a question:

“Do you believe this?”<sup>16</sup>

That's the question Easter puts in front of every one of us.  
Not just intellectually—but personally. Do you believe this?

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<sup>16</sup> John 11:25-26

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I'll close with a story about a missionary in Brazil who came to a tribe living near a river. The people were dying from disease, and there was a hospital with a cure just across the river—but they wouldn't cross it. They believed the river was filled with evil spirits.

The missionary explained that he had crossed it. They didn't believe him. He stepped into the water. Still nothing. Finally, he dove in, swam across, and came up on the other side—alive.

And when they saw him, they followed.  
That's what Jesus has done.  
He entered the river of death... and came out the other side.  
And now he stands there, calling to us:  
"Come. Follow me."<sup>17</sup>

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So may we have the courage to step toward the empty tomb. May we have the curiosity of Peter. May we hear the truth spoken into our fears and doubts. And may we live as people of the resurrection—believing that because Jesus lives...we shall fully live also...both in this life as God's new creation and the life after life after death to come.<sup>18</sup>

He is risen. He is risen indeed.  
Amen.

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<sup>17</sup> Max Lucado, *Six Hours One Friday: Living in the Power of the Cross* (Thomas Nelson, 2019 reprint), pp. 126-127

<sup>18</sup> John 14:19