

Easter 2011: The Power of the Resurrection
(Adapted from Matt Chandler)
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Most Christians don't understand the implications of the resurrection. We know Jesus died on the cross, and most of us get that. We know that the cross is huge. If a church isn't talking about the cross -the blood spattered, screaming agony, wrath absorbing cross of Jesus –it's not a church. It may be a civic club, or a humanitarian organization, but without the cross we're not the church.

But too many Christians get the cross, but we don't get the resurrection. Oh I suppose we know it's important. We know that without the resurrection Jesus wouldn't be God. We know that the resurrection means that we can't ignore Jesus, that if you want the Father, you'd better follow the Son. We know what the resurrection means for Jesus, but what does it mean for us, for how we live, in this world? You see, it's a misunderstanding of the resurrection that binds us to a life of boredom, that binds us to a life of triviality, to a purposeless drifting through life in this world as we wait for heaven. Most Christians, most people live lives that are flat-out boring, and empty, and kind of pathetic as we try to fill the void with junk that just doesn't satisfy. Listen, the Bible says, Just as Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of the Father, now we also may live new lives." (Romans 6.4) Because of the resurrection, we can live new lives. Have you experienced that? A new life, a different kind of life – not just in heaven, but right here, right now.

Luke 24: it's a great chapter, one of the more playful chapters in the Bible. If you want to look it up in your Bible or on your iPhone or your iPad, go fast, because I'm going to get cranking. Here's what has happened. It's Sunday, the Sunday after Jesus was crucified. A group of women go to the tomb to put spices on a corpse, but they find the tomb empty. Then two angels appear to them and remind them that Jesus had told them that he was going to die, and then he was going to rise from the dead. So the women run back to tell the disciples, and the disciples were stunned. None of them expected Jesus to come back from the dead. Peter was so worked up he ran to the tomb to see for himself, but it was empty. And it says he went home confused. Guys, they didn't expect Jesus back.

That's all in the first part of Luke 24. Now we get to one of the more playful stories in the Bible. This is Jesus with a sense of humor. Verse 13: That

same day two of Jesus' followers were walking to the village of Emmaus, (get this, this is important) seven miles from Jerusalem. Now let me tell you why this is so important. The resurrection of Jesus creates a historical problem for the secular mind. It's not a biblical problem, it's a historical problem for those who do not believe, because something happens. Something changed the whole direction of history. Historically you have to do something with the resurrection of Jesus. What most people do is to turn on the Discovery Channel, and they will feed you these theories about why people "saw" Jesus after he was dead. One theory is that after they beat Jesus with their fists, and peeled his skin off with their whips, and whacked him with their sticks, and drove nails into his hands and feet, and hung him on a cross where he agonized for hours, struggling to breathe, drowning in his own blood, after they took a spear and rammed it through his ribcage, and yanked it out so he bled out — in all that he didn't die! Not only did he not die, he was like Wolverine! Because 40 hours later he is jogging 7 miles to Emmaus.

Listen guys, I know that on the surface what we believe as Christians sounds silly. It really does. Listen to what we believe. We believe that a virgin gave birth to a man who would live an absolutely perfect life. And even though he was perfect, they murdered him. But he rose from the dead, and kind of popped around for 40 days, then he floated up to heaven. And someday he's coming back to get us riding on a white horse. You've got to admit, that all sounds kind of crazy, doesn't it? We actually believe that. The Bible says that the message of the cross is foolishness.

But listen to what they believe. After Jesus got this incredible beating, after they had tried to execute him in the most brutal way they could imagine... Have you ever sprained an ankle badly or broken a toe and tried to walk? Well, Jesus had nails driven through his feet, he bore the weight of his body on those nails for hours. And then two days later he walks 7 miles to Emmaus?! Come on, guys! That's stupid. You see, once you become angry and bitter at religion, if you are not careful, you will let yourself drift into intellectual absurdity. Some people think atheists have no beliefs. They do. A lot of atheists say, "There is no God, and I hate him." So the Discovery Channel does a special on how Jesus didn't die, he just healed quickly — like Wolverine. They wouldn't actually say Wolverine, they'll just point to some guy in the war who got shot and crawled for miles. Yeah, that's what happened here.

The Bible says, "As they walked along they were talking about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things, Jesus

himself suddenly came and began walking with them. But God kept them from recognizing him." This is kind of fun — Jesus incognito, mustache, dark glasses, wig. And listen to what he says: "He asked them, 'What are you discussing so intently as you walk along?' He just kind of sidles up alongside and says, "Hey guys! What's up? What you talking about?" It 6says, "They stopped short, sadness written across their faces. Then one of them, Cleopas, replied, "You must be the only person in Jerusalem who hasn't heard about all the things that have happened there the last few days." And Jesus says, "What things?" You've got to love that. He's playing with their minds. He knew what they were doing. "What things?" They said, "The things that happened to Jesus, the man from Nazareth. He was a prophet who did powerful miracles, and he was a mighty teacher in the eyes of God and all the people. But our leading priests and other religious leaders handed him over to be condemned to death, and they crucified him. We had hoped he was the Messiah who had come to rescue Israel. This all happened three days ago. Then some women from our group of his followers were at his tomb early this morning, and they came back with an amazing report. They said his body was missing, and they had seen angels who told them Jesus is alive. Some of our men ran out to see, and sure enough, his body was gone, just as the women had said."

What do you think Jesus is doing when they are telling them all this? Do you think he's biting his cheek so he doesn't laugh? Or do you think it starts turning from amusement to frustration? Then Jesus said to them, "You (twits, you dorks, you dimwits, you) foolish people! You find it so hard to believe all that the prophets wrote in the Scriptures." Don't you get it? Were those just fairy tales to you? "Wasn't it clearly predicted that the Messiah would have to suffer all these things before entering his glory?" Then, it says, Jesus took them through the writings of Moses and all the prophets, explaining from all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. But he still didn't show them who he was! Isn't that great!

It says, "By this time they were nearing Emmaus and the end of their journey. Jesus acted as if he were going on, but they begged him, 'Stay the night with us, since it is getting late.' So he went home with the As they sat down to eat, he took the bread and blessed it. Then he broke it and gave it to them. Suddenly, their eyes were opened, and they recognized him. And at that moment he disappeared!" Now that's cool, isn't it? He rips off the mustache and the dark glasses and the wig, and then he vanishes. Do you think God has a sense of humor?

And they said to each other, "Didn't our hearts burn within us as he talked with us on the road and explained the Scriptures to us?" And within the hour they were on their way back to Jerusalem. Did you get that? They had been on the road for hours, 7 miles, with this wolverine Jesus. When they finally realize it's him — poof — he vanishes. And they are like, "Holy Cow!" And they turn around and run all the back to Jerusalem — 7 miles.

The story keeps getting better. It says, "They found the eleven disciples and the others who had gathered with them, who said, 'The Lord has really risen! He appeared to Peter.' Then the two from Emmaus told their story of how Jesus had appeared to them as they were walking along the road, and how they had recognized him as he was breaking the bread. And this is cool. God just keeps messing with them. It says, "Just as they were telling about it, Jesus himself was suddenly standing there among them. And he says, "Peace, to you." Yeah right! That's just cool, isn't it? Jesus just poofs from Emmaus to Jerusalem, all his guys are standing there excited and confused, and Jesus just kind of walks up and says, "Hey guys! What's going on? I'm back!" How could you not worship a God like this?

Okay, let's keep going. It says, "The whole group was startled and e, S i frightened, (no kidding!) thinking they were seeing a ghost! Which brings us to another Discovery Channel absurdity. Guys, don't take seriously those specials on TV! The idea is, these guys are so distraught, they are so torn up by the death of their messiah, that in their confusion and grief they just think they see his ghost. Maybe he wasn't a wolverine Jesus, maybe he was just a ghost. And the Discovery Channel will find people whose children have died who have these visions of their dead kid walking into their bedroom and saying, "I love you mommy." Come on! Jesus says, "Why are you frightened? Why are your hearts filled with doubt? Look at my hands. Look at my feet. You can see that it's really me. Touch me and make sure that I am not a ghost, because ghosts don't have bodies, as you see that I do. As he spoke, he showed them his hands and his feet. He says, "Touch me, squeeze my hands! Here, pop me in the shoulder. Do I feel like a ghost to you?"

Guys, Tom and Jerry kind of ruined the resurrection for a whole lot of people. We kind of think we're going to float up to heaven, lay down on some cloud, and play harp for a few million years. Sounds kind of boring doesn't it? This isn't about a ghost — this is Jesus, raised from the dead. And then he kicks it up another level. It says, "Still they stood there in disbelief, filled with joy and wonder. Then he asked them, 'Do you have

anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he ate it as they watched." That just doesn't sound like any Discovery Channel ghost, does it?

Then he said, "When I was with you before, I told you that everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and in the Psalms (the whole Bible pointed to me, he said,) must be fulfilled." Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. And he said, "Yes, it was written long ago that the Messiah would suffer and die and rise from the dead on the third day. It was also written that this message would be proclaimed in the authority of his name to all the nations, beginning in Jerusalem: There is forgiveness of sins for all who repent.' You are witnesses of all these things...

Okay, here's what we usually do on Easter. We usually read verses like these and then move on to the evidence -- the historical evidence, the circumstantial evidence, the experiential evidence -- that it's all true.

- Like, what do you do with the fact that the disciples were all cowards, and then suddenly they weren't? What do you do with that, if you are not a Christian? What do you do with Peter, denying Jesus, going into hiding, and then a few weeks later standing on the street corners of Jerusalem challenging the guys who killed Jesus so ferociously that he didn't care whether he lived or died? They were all like that!
- What do you do with the fact that just 25 years later, when Paul is writing to the Corinthians, he says there are still 500 people still alive who saw the resurrected Jesus? Go ask them, he says, they'll swear to it, no matter what it costs them. What do you do with that, if you are not a Christian?
- Here's a good one: What do you do with the fact that his family worshiped Jesus as a God? Isn't that a problem for those who don't believe? They give James, his brother, a chance to recant. This guy was so pious they called him "camel-knees," he spent so much time praying. When he wouldn't recant they threw him off the wall of the temple. His body was shattered, but he still wouldn't deny Jesus. so they stoned him to death. That was his brother, guys. What do you do with the fact that his mother worshiped him as God? His whole family did. Listen, guys. If my kid came up to me and tried to convince me he's God, he goes away and I get his computer. If there are any flaws in you, your family is going to know.
- Here's another: What do you do with the fact that for 2000 years

worship was on Saturday, and then all of a sudden it shifted to Sunday? How many of you guys have spent more than 5 years in church? Is there anything in your experience with church people that would lead you to believe that after 2000 years of Saturday, one day they are all going to say, "Let's try Sundays for a while." Guys, it takes about 5 years for some tradition to become so sacred to church people that they'd murder you for it. What do you do with their swapping one of the ten commandments for Sunday – resurrection day?

- Here's another: What do you do with the incredible spread of Christianity. There's nothing like it. They didn't use a sword, like the Muslims. But within three centuries half the Roman Empire claimed Jesus as Lord, and for most of those three centuries it was against the law to be a Christian! It was dangerous to be Christian.

That's what we usually do on Easter, we roll out all the evidence for Jesus – and it is powerful. And I suppose that stuff is still necessary, as long as the idiots at the Discovery Channel keep making their stupid shows. But I don't want to leave it there. I don't just want to focus on the facts, I want unpack the meaning. What does it mean for us, right here, right now?

Every once in a while we get this sense that something has gone terribly wrong with our world. Every once in a while we know it is broken, badly.

- I think the most piercing cries I have ever heard have been at the funeral of a baby. I remember one where twins had died, and the momma, who was precious to me ... her tears broke my heart. I remember another whose little body kept getting weaker, and more fragile, until she died. Guys, I know the biology of disease. I know why they died, physically, but they shouldn't make coffins that small.
- Every once in a while we realize it's broken. Just go into a bookstore. Why is it that the biggest section in most bookstores is self-help? Isn't that pretty solid evidence that something is pretty badly wrong, with most people?
- Just read the newspaper, just turn on CNN, just surf the news sites on the web. Guys, for being as advanced as we claim to be technologically, and scientifically, and educationally, the world is just as dark, and as wicked, and as evil as it has ever been, isn't it? Greed; bickering so bitter that men would destroy our economy rather than give an inch to fix it; barbarous, cruel tyrants; hatred; sexual depravity... Guys, it's broken, you know it's broken.

And God says, "I agree, and I've been unfolding a plan to fix it."

- 2000 years before Jesus God said to Abraham, "I know it's broken, but I'm going to roll in a kingdom. And in my kingdom people will be different, they will live a different kind of life. And someday, in my kingdom, there will be no injustice, no oppression, no disease, no death. Someday, when my kingdom reaches its fullness, there will be no suffering, no sin — it will be as you know it should be.
- 1500 years before Jesus God gave his people the Law. God says, "in this law you get some idea of how it is supposed to work. In this law you get a peek at what it looks like to do life my way, a different kind of life."
- But we kept messing up. Even when we know the rules we keep messing up, and we keep hurting each other, and we keep hurting ourselves. So God gave us the sacrifices. Blood is shed so we know how serious our sin is; blood is shed to cover our sins. It's a foreshadow, a hint at what was coming.
- 1000 years before Jesus the prophets started prophesying about the Kingdom that was coming, and the Messiah who bring it. And in the Psalms they began singing songs about what it would be like when God's Kingdom got here.
- And then, at the end of the Old Testament story, there is this silence. For about 400 years there is silence ... as they wait ... sometimes confused and discouraged.
- And then a weird guy shows up in the desert eating roaches. I know it says "locusts," but in my mind it's pretty much the same. And this guy who dresses funny and eats funny says, "Guys, it's here. What was promised to Abraham, what was foreshadowed in the law, and the sacrifices, what was promised by the prophets, and celebrated in the Psalms — it's here, he's here, said John the Baptist. Get ready. And one day Jesus shows up and John says, uh uh; and Jesus says, uh huh — and John baptizes him. And then things start happening. Jesus teaches like no one has ever heard; he does stuff that no one has ever done. He lives this perfect life. Do you know why he had to live a perfect life? Because he had to make up for yours, and mine. He had to be holy so we could be holy, in him.
- And then he goes to the cross. We get that part. We get the cross. We know he didn't die for himself, he was doing it for us. When they arrested Jesus, and beat him, and spit on him, and peeled the skin from his back, and drove nails into his hands and feet, and the worst of humanity stood there and watched and mocked as he died — I died that day too, and you died that day too. Every wicked thought

we have ever had, every wicked thing we have ever done, every piece of disobedience and pride in us died that day. He absorbed the wrath of God toward me so that by no merit of my own, I can stand holy, blameless, and perfect before the God of the universe. The Bible says, "God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in him." Guys, is that the most amazing thing in the world?

Here's the deal, in one sense the cross saves us "from." I'm going to fly through these because I'm not quite done. 1 Thessalonians 1: He saves us from the wrath to come; Romans 7: He saves us from the penalty of the law, and He saves us from slavery to sin; John 8: He saves us from Satan; Colossians 1: He saves us from the power of darkness; Romans 8: He saves us from sin and from death. That's what Jesus was doing on that cross, he was saving us from...

But it's not just about saving us from, it's about saving us to. The Bible says, "Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glorious power of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life, now we also may live new lives." (Romans 6.4) Everything is different for us, in Jesus. John 10: He saves us to abundant life; John 3: He saves us to eternal life; Galatians 5: He saves us to freedom; 1 Corinthians 12: he saves us to community; he saves us to significance; he saves us to purpose; he saves us to mission; he saves us to joy... You guys need some of that stuff?

Guys, even those of us who claim to be Christian usually don't get it. He offers us this newness of life, and we settle for the old. We get caught up pursuing the same trivialities as those without God. We obsess over the same junk that has left people empty for millennia. We are afraid to sell out to God, so we settle. We refuse to go all the way with God, so we miss it. We don't want to give up our petty little pleasures, and our petty little castles, so we miss out on his. Guys, God promises, in Christ, to do life with us, and through us, and in us. God promises, in Christ, to shape us into what we were meant to be, so we can do what we were meant to do. If we will only have the courage to go all the way.

Guys, here's what's awful. The majority of Christians are living a life just as boring, just as empty as people out there without God. Despite the fact that there is more to do today than at any time in history, we are bored and empty. So we try to fill our emptiness with entertainment, with music, with sex, with alcohol, with sport, with adventure, with work. We sit around fantasizing about living a life that mattered. Wouldn't it be cool if I had

these opportunities, if I had this money, if I had this stuff. We sit around and dream: wouldn't it be great if I were William Wallace. Most of us are not. Most of us are the sell-out nobles who sit around and count their money, and build their little castles, without spine, without verve. We don't paint our faces blue. We are not what he means when he says, "Every man dies, but not every man really lives." But we could be. Do you know why that movie is so powerful to us — because it's pointing to a spiritual reality that we know is true. There is more, to life, than we are living.

We know there is more. We know there has to be more. Guys, the resurrection of Jesus calls us to a different kind of life. The power of the resurrection is not just that it proves he is God and that someday he's coming back. God wants his resurrection to make a difference in your life today, every day. That you will live for something more, something grander, something infinitely more satisfying than the trivial quests we obsess over. God created you to make a difference in this world. God created you to make a difference in the lives of people he has brought around you. God has given you a purpose, a mission that matters. God calls you to bring good news to people who are dying without Jesus. God calls you to proclaim that those who are captives to sin can find freedom in Jesus, that those who are blind to truth can find truth in Jesus. God calls you to liberate the oppressed — to point them to a God in whose kingdom poverty, and oppression, and injustice, and pain are over...

Let's give people a taste of Jesus by living our lives differently. Let's give people a taste of his kingdom by living together in this church family differently. Let's bring people face to face with Jesus so that some day, when he comes back to sort everything out...

Oh that you might understand the implications of the resurrection. Oh that you might come out of the morass of boredom and triviality. Oh that you might live well, and love well, and work well. Because, someday, this mirage is going to be lifted. And ... look at me ... some of you are going to be so embarrassed.