

I. Good morning. Happy Easter. Thanks for being here. Shout out to those joining us from CR, HP, VH, The 01 or home. And my annual greetings to those here against your will – those of you who appealed to the Geneva Convention this morning in your efforts to get out of forced attendance at church. You know who you are, and so do most of the rest of us! Thanks for taking one for the team. You will survive. Brunch is coming.

II. Forty years ago – back when I was in college - the nation got wrapped up in a TV story about a Texas oil family called the Ewings. The big moment in the show, which was called *Dallas*, pivoted around the murder attempt of the show’s arch-villain: JR Ewing, played by the late Larry Hagman.

A. Between the end of season three – which is when the murder attempt happened – and the fourth episode of the fourth season, eight months later, when 83 million Americans tuned in to find out if he survived and who shot him – “Who shot JR?” was the question of the hour. It was a meme before memes were a thing. Hagman was on the cover of all the magazines. You could place bets in Vegas on who the killer was. Saturday Night Live ran all kinds of spoofs on it. Lots of people talked about “Who Shot JR.”

B. I was in college and there was only one TV in the fraternity – only one screen in the house - and other than a few guys who watched Star Trek reruns every afternoon, it was almost never on. But I was walking through the TV lounge when JR was shot – and it was on eight months later when I was walking through again when it was revealed who had shot him.

C. Now, it didn’t mean much to me. I had to go to Wikipedia to be reminded who did it (it was a scheming sister-in-law). Why am I telling you this? Because right now, some of you are having an experience similar to mine back then. Everyone is talking about something – and you have not been paying attention. You do not know the backstory, but you are walking through the TV lounge at the very moment when something big is being talked about – the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth. The problem is, you do not know enough of the story to be gripped by it. But you should be.

III. For the last few months, we’ve been studying the second half of the Gospel of John, trying to understand what “the life” we are supposed to live – the abundant life we are invited into – looks like.

A. In John 10, Jesus says: **I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.** What does that mean? What does that look like? Where do we go for that abundance?

B. In an effort to answer that question, we’ve been walking through the last week of Christ’s life (which is called Holy Week).

1. There are four Gospels – four New Testament books written to persuade us that Jesus is God (the promised savior) and that we need to follow him.

2. These four Gospels all tell the same story, albeit from slightly different angles. And they all spend most of their time on the last week of Christ’s life – because his death is very important.

3. John’s Gospel, which is where we’ve been, was written to persuade the Greeks to believe in Jesus.

C. We started this series in John 12 – just as Jesus was preparing to walk into Jerusalem in advance of the Passover. And we looked at:

1. The things Jesus taught – his comments about love and his claim that the Passover was about him.
 2. And the things Jesus did – such as wash the disciples' feet.
 3. And we looked at some of what happened – his prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, his arrest, Peter's denial.
- D. Last Sunday we celebrated the way Jesus paraded into Jerusalem in advance of the Passover - which happened back in John 12 at the start of the series.
- E. During this past week – Holy Week – we've held some services and events to retrace what happened between his Triumphal Entry and now: on Monday he went to the Temple and overturned tables. On Tuesday and Wednesday he set up shop next to the Temple in order to present himself as the new Temple. On Thursday – during the Last Supper - he co-opted the Passover meal, claiming that it was always about him and turning it into Holy Communion.
- F. On Friday – Good Friday – he was crucified.
- G. Today's passage – some of which was just read for you – focuses on the events of Sunday morning. Let's walk through this passage.

IV. Early on the first day of the week (that would be Sunday), **while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene** (A woman he had healed who became a follower) **went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.**

- A. In the first century, corpses were attended to in a variety of ways. If you were rich – Jesus was not, but Joseph of Arimathea was, and Joseph had not only become a follower of Christ, he'd been one of those who helped attend to Jesus's body. To that end, he had had placed Jesus in his grave.
- B. Which as an aside, is one of a couple hundred prophecies that describe aspects of the Messiah.
1. In Micah we are told he'll be born in Bethlehem. In Genesis we are told he will be from the tribe of Judah. In Jeremiah we are told he'll be descendent of David. In Hosea we told that he will spend time in Egypt. In Isaiah 53:9 we are told that his death is assigned to be with the wicked, but he ends up with the rich.
 2. A few weeks ago, much was made about the odds of anyone filling out a perfect bracket for college basketball. They are 1 in 9 quintillion. Well, the odds that one person could fulfill all of the prophecies made about Christ are more extreme than that.
- C. All of that aside, Jesus was placed in a grave and a heavy stone – one that had been chiseled into a disc – had been rolled in front of the entrance.
1. If you visit Israel, you can visit the two places that claim to be the spot: the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Garden Tomb. Scholars debate which is right. And in the Garden Tomb you can see what this would be like.
- D. In the Jewish world, the day starts at sundown. Jesus was crucified on a Friday. Friday night turns into Saturday – which was the Jewish Sabbath. And for all kinds of religious reasons, they wanted him off the cross and in the grave by sundown. So, they had rushed the treatment of the body. Mary and a few other women wanted to go back and do a better job. So, they were returning to the tomb. When you read the other Gospels you realize – they were worried about who would help them roll the stone back, but when they got there the stone was already rolled back and the body was gone.

V. **V2: So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved -** This is John – the one writing this account (he calls himself the one Jesus loved. One of the shocking things about the Bible is how openly it advertises the blind spots and mistakes of the “good guys.” As a rule, early historical accounts take these out.) - **and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”**

VI. **So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.** (In fairness to Peter, John was much younger). **He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.** ⁶**Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb.** (That sounds like Peter. He was nothing if not impetuous). **He saw the strips of linen lying there,** ⁷**as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen.** (Interesting details that show the earlier efforts to treat the body). **Finally (v8) the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead. Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.**

VII. ¹¹**Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying.** (It has been a very trying for days for her. And now this). **As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.**

VIII. ¹³**They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” At this, (v14) she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.**

IX. **He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”**

X. ¹⁶**Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). V17: Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

XI. ¹⁸**Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her. And then, later – V 19: On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you!” After he said this, he showed them his hands and side.** (They would be pierced. He was proving who He was). **The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord.**

XII. ²¹**Again Jesus said, “Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you.” And with that he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone’s sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”**

XIII. There is a lot here. Way more than we can begin to cover this morning.

A. I had a class in grad school taught by William Lane Craig – now a fairly prominent author and apologist. He has spent the last 30 years debating skeptics and atheists, including

people like Richard Dawkins and Christopher Hitchens). The class was given over to reading and discussing one of his two PhD dissertations. He had done a PhD on the intersection of philosophy and physics on the cosmological argument for God's existence. And he had done a second on the intersection of history and theology, looking at the historical arguments in favor of the resurrection.

B. Just to be clear. The claim is that Jesus:

1. who existed as God before he entered time and space as a person –entered the world through a virgin's womb;
2. lived a perfect life (he fulfilled the law);
3. Spent three years as a Rabi – a teacher. (As an aside, many say they love Jesus teaching but do not spend much time looking at it. His most popular subject was himself. In all kinds of ways he was making it clear that He was the son of God and promised Messiah.

C. OK, so: he was God before he became the God-man; he became the God-man, lived a perfect life, spent three years as a rabi

1. He then died in our place – He became the perfect and final sacrifice for sin so that those who embrace him can be reconciled to God. Can not only be forgiven but be given his perfect righteousness.
2. Many people mess up here. They think that Jesus was only an example, which means the message is try harder to be better. He was an example, but he wasn't just that. He claimed to be much more. And the story sets him up as a sacrifice – THE sacrifice. He died to pay our moral debt.
3. And then, on the third day, he rose from the dead in a new resurrected body.

D. The claim is not that he rose metaphorically:

1. Set aside all the nonsense about the resurrection being about flowers in Springtime or that a new resurrection happens with every sunrise or every time a child laughs.
2. And set aside the suggestion that Jesus only rose spiritually. The big deal – that we just read about – is that the body was gone.
 - a) Which – by the way - is something everyone agrees to. The Roman and Jewish historians all agree that the tomb was empty. There are theories about what might have happened other than what the New Testament argues. You can read Craig's 600-page dissertation on that – not all of which is in English – or we will send you a ten page summary of the arguments that I wrote. If you fill out the card we will send you the chapter in which I discuss the theories.
3. The claim is that Jesus rose from the dead and this matters because:
 - a) The fact that he conquered death – as he said he would – suggests that we should pay attention to his other claims. One of which is that those who embrace him – and are adopted into the family of God – and will also be resurrected in the age to come.

XIV. Let me summarize that again:

A. The claim is that: Jesus is God. That He existed as God before he added humanity to deity. That he then lived a perfect life – taught and loved and fulfilled all of the prophecies -

before he took upon himself the punishment for our sins, dying in the process. But was resurrected with an eternal body – just as he claimed would happen.

XV. If this is true – as I believe it is – it is the most important information you are going to hear. And it means that there is hope.

XVI. It's been a challenging and unsettling few years. Some of you have had a particularly rough go of it.

A. I think that most people – even those who are alert to the many ways things have been getting better over the last twenty-to-thirty years (during which time the news has often been bad and occasionally apocalyptic):

1. Hundreds of millions of people have gained access to clean water.
2. Hundreds of millions – maybe a billion people - have been lifted out of extreme poverty.
3. Our rivers have gotten cleaner, the ozone hole has gotten smaller, literacy rates have skyrocketed, infant mortality has dropped, life expectancy has climbed.
4. In many ways, this is as good as it's ever been. We are living the dream.

B. However, as good as it is, there are real problems out there.

1. It looks like we're going to face a rough ten years and I'm not sure we have any clear idea how we will navigate the challenges coming our way after that.
2. The Ambient Anger Index is high. Depression numbers are high. Anxiety numbers are high. Mental illness is up.
3. I know people who are optimistic for themselves. They think that things will be bad for others, but they think things will get better for them.

C. I bring this up only to say, I am not talking about now. I am not talking about the next ten years.

1. I do not really have an opinion on whether you should be optimistic. I am not suggesting that you should have faith in science or a political party or your own goodness.

D. I am inviting you to have hope in Christ.

1. Who showed up on earth. Who lived a perfect life. Who said he would die – and did. Who said he would be raised on the third day and was.

E. I want to encourage you to be a Christ-follower.

1. I want to invite you to place your hope in Him and to shape your life on his teaching.
2. I want to say to you – one of the big challenges you face is learning to pay attention to things that matter.
3. Every age has its good points and its bad ones – it's challenges.
4. One of the challenges of this moment is that the volume and velocity of culture is so great, our lives get overrun by things that do not matter, or do not matter much – or will not matter in ten minutes let alone 10 years – and as a result, we do not pay attention to the things that will matter in 10,000 years.

F. You were created by God. Your sin means that relationship is broken. Jesus showed up to show the way and to make a way for you to move back to God.

G. He died in your place. And he conquered death. He invites you to take the narrow road and follow him.

H. Decide now to follow Jesus.

XVII. You can get a copy of my summary of Craig's dissertation – it's fifth chapter in the Life of Christ book I wrote. I'm glad to send that to you.

XVIII. Talk with a campus pastor

XIX. As you heard, we start a series of daily devotions tomorrow morning

A. The first week is directed at a few basic questions. Then, next week, we start into a 7 week study of the Book of Hebrews, which is all about Christ.