

## **The Significance of Easter**

Well welcome to this resurrection Sunday. If you are new here today, or attend here regularly, I want to welcome you as we open up God's Word and listen to what he has to say to us. We are going to try and anchor what is said today in the Bible. So if you have a Bible turn to John chapter 11 which is on page 897.

In High School I worked for Wright Brothers Construction and did a lot of foundation concrete work. And I remember thinking to myself, man, this is such hard work. And since I was new to construction, this was not only hard work but really unfulfilling work. I'd think to myself, "Man, you never even see any of this. You just dig way down under the ground do all this work and then bury it back up. I wondered if all of that is really necessary. What would happen if you cut some corners?"

Well, now as a 40 year old adult, I know exactly what would happen. The structure would collapse. My parents bought an old farmhouse

about 20 years ago and the entire porch and one whole side of the building was sloping into the dirt because the foundation strategy was so poor. The weight of the structure was too much for those tiny little blocks and the structure just sagged right into the dirt. We had to jack the whole house up and re-pour the foundation. And I learned from that experience that the structure is only as good as the foundation.

If you look up the word foundation in the dictionary, it defines it as the lowest load-bearing part of a structure, typically below ground level.

Well, the resurrection of Jesus Christ is what we are here today to celebrate and truly it is the lowest load-bearing point of Christianity. It's this foundational point upon which the whole worldview rests. Christianity stands or falls based on the resurrection. And in a sense, it too is below ground level. The sands of time have covered it up. The resurrection happened in a point of history we cannot see. We have to do some excavation to really see the enormity of those foundation stones.

And it's important that those stones are massive because Christianity claims some pretty weighty, pretty extravagant, pretty outlandishly heavy assertions.

- God created the world out of nothing. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." That's a heavy claim.
- God has created a system of right and wrong and there exists a place called heaven and a place called hell and he will judge men when they die. That's a heavy claim.
- God has performed many miracles through history: The Red Sea opened up and people passed through on dry ground, the entire earth was flooded and a man was saved on a boat, an ax head

floated, the sun stood still. Those are pretty ridiculously, heavy claims.

If these claims are going to stand, they need a foundation that can support the weight of this skyscraper we call Christianity. If the foundation is faulty the whole structure collapses. But if the foundation is firm, then how great a skyscraper it will be! The whole of Christianity rests squarely on the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But here's the question? How do we know? If the entire structure of Christianity rests on the resurrection, an event that is below ground level, that is buried in the sands of time, buried in the pages of this ancient book that I don't even know if I believe, how can I know if it's true? How can we see if the foundation is firm when it's underground and invisible to me?

Answer you put weight on it: You test it. By placing weight onto the foundation even though you can't see it, you can prove what's really there.

And so what we are going to do today is to lean on this resurrection truth. We are going to test the ability of this foundation truth to resist whatever force you may apply to it.

And I want to invite you to apply the heaviest burdens you can think. Ask the most difficult questions. Let me give you some examples of the kinds of forces you are invited to apply.

- God if you are good why did this bad thing happen in my past? Where were you God when I was abused? Where were you God when I was molested? Where were you when I was in this very dark place?
- Forget the past. Where are you now God as I suffer? Where are

you in Syria and the Middle East and Eastern Ukraine? Why are you allowing war? Why do you allow starvation?

- God where were you when my child died? Where were you when my marriage fell apart? How come you didn't help me avoid this beast of a man I got married to?

Can the resurrection resist the weight of those forces? Can the resurrection provide meaningful answers to those kinds of questions. (by the way, apply these questions to any worldview. This is the way you test them.)..

Now what I want to do is take you to a passage of Scripture in which questions exactly like this were put on Jesus and I want to show you how he uses the foundational hope of who he is and the power of the resurrection to answer questions very similar to these.

## **Lazarus Background**

Now if you have a Bible turn to John chapter 11. A little context here, Jesus has been teaching and performing miracles for the three years. But his popularity among the religious leaders has been slowly, steadily and now quickly dwindling. He's not welcome in certain places but especially in the religious capital, Jerusalem. In the chapter just before, in John chapter 10, Jesus is teaching in Jerusalem and he's accused of blasphemy by the religious leaders. He says, "I and the father are one" and the Jews pick up stones to stone him but he evades their grasp and flees out into the desert, crosses the Jordan river and basically just hangs out in the countryside.

Well, in Jesus' absence there are some things happening back in Jerusalem. This is where we are picking up the story.

John 11:1-2, Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. (ESV)

Now Lazarus, Mary and Martha are all very close to Jesus. These are common names that come up over and over again when you read the gospels. These guys are like family to Jesus which I think is why we get this little parenthetical aside letting us know the relationship between Jesus and Mary. There was an endearing closeness.

And we are told that Lazarus is sick. And I don't know what kind of sickness, the text doesn't tell us. But I imagine it was sudden and severe. And we know it's severe because Mary and Martha think he's going to die. It's bad enough for them to send a runner 20 miles into the desert to go fetch Jesus.

John 11:3-5, So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it." (ESV)

What do you think about this response? It throws me. I would be expecting, wow, I'm so sorry to hear that Lazarus is sick. I'll drop everything and come help. But instead he points out a category of sickness I'm not really comfortable with. A sickness that won't kill you but is for the glory of God. Some of you right now are probably living that sickness. Maybe that's even the question you'd like to ask God. Maybe you need to test the foundation of Christianity by applying that sort of weight to those foundation stones. God what is the point of all this sickness and hurt that I feel right now? And maybe your confused because the answer that comes back is not healing, but this is a sickness that is for the glory of God.

Now what reads next is some of the most bizarre lines in the Bible. Picture the scene. Mary and Martha are incredibly worried. At first they just wait. One day, then two days. And Lazarus is just getting worse. And finally they say, "I've never seen him this sick.

- He's in and out of consciousness.
- He's in total delirium.

- What should we do?

So they send a runner to find Jesus. The only thing we can do is cry out to Jesus."

And what happens next for them is the torture of waiting. Now this is easy to forget, but remember they have no cell-phones, and they have no way of texting or anything like that and you can imagine the agony of just waiting.

Their hope left two days ago by foot. No updates. No idea if the runner even found Jesus. Just waiting...waiting.

- Every time he coughs it's more congested and shallower.
- And he's burning up with fever and they can't do anything about it.
- And he's been throwing up now for three days.
- He's whiter and thinner by the hour.

And every five minutes they just look out the window to see. Is he here yet? Is he coming? Is he on the way? Nope. Another five minutes. Maybe now. They love Lazarus. He's Mary's brother. Another look. Still nothing. Another cough. Some blood.

And then finally they see the runner. Did you find him? Did you tell him? Is he coming? And you can see a bit of hesitancy in his eyes. Yeah, I found him and I told him, "Jesus, Lazarus, the one you love is no kidding around sick. I mean he's basically in a coma. He's vomiting up blood. I think he's only got days, maybe hours to live. You got to come now and save him?"

Well, what did he say. He said that this is not the kind of sickness that leads to death.

And the three of them look at Lazarus whose pale and thin and

incontinent and they think, really? The smells that are coming out of this guy don't smell like health. Doesn't Jesus care that he's this sick? Does Jesus want help us? I thought he loved us?

How many suffering people in the world have asked that question? Jesus, if you cared you change my situation. If you cared you would undo these circumstances. If you cared you would remove this sickness. And then we read these verses which are absolutely bizarre.

John 11:5-6, Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.  
(ESV)

What? That makes no sense. Jesus is letting Lazarus die, on purpose. He's letting Lazarus suffer. He's letting Mary Suffer. He's Letting Martha suffer. They are all suffering. He could do something about it but he's choosing not to. Why? Why?

The text says, Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus deeply. NOTICE THE NEXT WORD. SO, BECAUSE he loved them deeply, he let Lazarus die.

What is that? Lord what kind of love is that? What purpose could you possibly have? I have the assurance of your love on the one hand but then the absolute abandonment of you on the other. What am I to do with that?

Well Jesus is going to show them.

John 11:7-10, Then after this he said to the disciples,  
"Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to him,  
"Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you,  
and are you going there again?..."

After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.

Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." So Thomas, called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

So they work their way back up to Jerusalem where they know there is going to be political heat so much so that the disciples think they are going to die.

John 11:17-20, Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house.

So Jesus finally shows up. Late the game. It too late. It's probably with a pretty high degree of pain and even a sense of betrayal that they welcome him. Listen to what Martha says. Is this not the legitimate cry of a thousand hurting voices echoing through the corridors of the human experience.

Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Lord, where were you? If you had been here this wouldn't have happened. If you had been here, everything would be okay. But you weren't here and my brother is dead.

Let's just admit that we can't possibly imagine the dynamic here. We can't possibly appreciate the emotion and pain because we know how this story ends. But they don't know. All they know is that they send a runner, Jesus never showed up and they had to watch Lazarus die.

They've had to wrestle with the words of Jesus, this is not a sickness that leads to death, and he died. They watched him stop breathing. And for you who know a thing or two about death, death is never, never easy. Sickness that ends in death is always horrible.

- The progressive weakness.
- The labored breathing that turns to gurgling that gets shallower and shallower and then death.
- And Mary and Martha just went through all of that.

And they didn't then call the mortician and go home and take a bath and wait for the memorial service. They had to pick up his cold body and wash it. They had to wrap the body that was seizing up with rigamortis in grave clothes. Then they had to carry him to the tomb. She had been waiting for Jesus to come, waiting, waiting and Jesus was a no show. And Lazarus died. And this was supposed to be a sickness that did not lead to death?

Everything gets called into question. Her faith is rattled. And then, after it's all closed up and tidied up, finally Jesus shows up.

Martha's question is understandable. Lord, "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

I have the assurance of your love on the one hand but then the absolute abandonment of you on the other.

Lord where were you? Do you see how Martha is doing the exact same thing we often do with God. She's writing the end of the story before God does. She's trying to tell God how the story ends. She's concluded that God has BROKEN his promise. Martha isn't wondering how this thing will end. She isn't looking to the unseen future. In her mind it's ended. She knows how it ended. It ended with death. All her friends are there for the funeral. All she hears is cries and wailing and all she can see through the tears in her eyes is death. And Martha says, "Jesus where were you? Jesus if you had intervened things would have been better and different."

If there is any kind of abuse in your background, if there is any kind of neglect in your background, if there is any type of other darkness in your background, the question has to be in there. "Where were you? If you're good, where were you? If you're kind, where were you? If you are for me and not against me, where were you?" This is the question that prompts Martha's statement. "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

So she asks what is really on her heart and I think perhaps she knows that she's overstepping her bounds a bit and so to kind of back off that a little she says, a little Christian cliché, a platitude of sorts,

But even now I know that whatever you ask from God,  
God will give you.

Now she can't possibly believe that statement. They are true words, but they are just words. There is no way she believes them. Often times we say things we know are true but they just bounce off our heart and leave a hollow ring. God is in control. God loves you. Faith can move mountains. If it's God's will he can heal you. All that's true. But you're just saying it. The pain has stripped away the belief. Martha can't possibly believe what she says based on what comes next.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."  
Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in  
the resurrection on the last day."

In other words, yeah, I know God theoretically has power long off in some distant point in the future and sure he may have worked long ago in some point in the past but he's not working right now. I know that much. I just watched my brother die. This is what I'm supposed to say right now. God works all things together for good. Yeah, I get it.

And now Jesus breaks into her life. Martha, I'm not talking about the future. I am talking about now. I will restore all things in the future resurrection, but that future reality has bearing on this moment.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Martha do you believe that I am Lord, even over death? Jesus says, "I have power over death. I control death. I can give resurrection life. I can redeem broken life. I can heal a wounded soul.

Martha. I am the resurrection and the life. The resurrection and life isn't JUST some future event.

When we talk about the foundation of the Christianity being the resurrection, we are talking about the physical, historical, bodily resurrection of Jesus. But we are also talking about the person of Jesus. He says I am the resurrection.

Because I am the source of the at future resurrection power and can bring that future resurrection power into your life RIGHT NOW.

"I am the solution to this problem of broken pasts, shallow religion, meaningless existence." He says, "I am the resurrection."

Do you believe? And what she says next is the right answer. But

still, I think we can argue, still just words.

She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Now there's another great interchange here between Jesus and Mary but for the sake of time we will skip down to verse 38.

John 11:38-41, Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."

Now I want you to envision this scene. You'd expect when Jesus came the customary greetings and exchanging of hugs and condolences. But what in the world are we doing going down to look at a sealed grave. By now, the crowd has gathered around and there has to be murmuring. We are going to do what? Open the tomb? It's rotting.

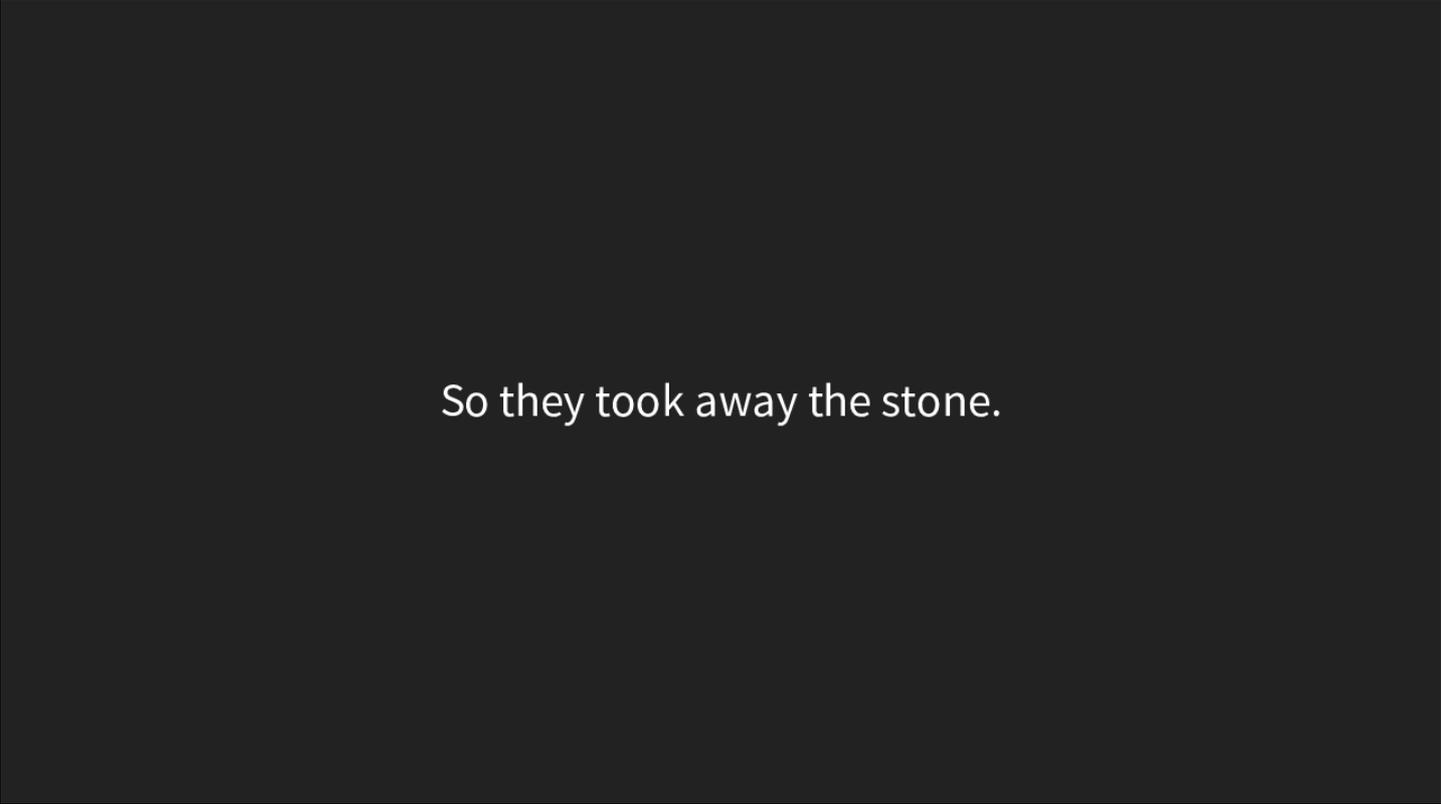
And Martha can now perhaps begin to see Jesus' intentions. And it's starting to get uncomfortable. Oh, I know theoretically you can resurrect. But not literally, right. Don't toy around with me like this. You almost get the sense that she'd rather just let Lazarus die, then have to risk her heart in Jesus' hands.

Martha had just finished confessing earlier, "Whatever you ask of God, He will give to you." Jesus just got done telling Martha, "Whoever believes in me will never die." Do you believe this? And Martha said, absolutely. And yet, now she hesitates. Certainly, you don't really mean that you can raise him from the dead.

Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"

Martha doubted. And yet, so tenderly here, Jesus doesn't rebuke her. I always think it is interesting that Jesus says, faith is necessary to see the glory of God. She doesn't have faith. And yet she still sees the glory of God. So like Jesus.

And then we get what I think are the most dramatic words of the narrative.



So they took away the stone.

So they took away the stone. What would it take for them to actually take away the stone? This would be the equivalent of saying, "Go dig up the body." I mean, it's done. It's over. Things would have had to progressed a long way to actually go the level of physically opening the tomb.

And I imagine that when that stone rolled back the smell must have arrested them. I'd love to see the video of this. You all know that smell. The smell of a decomposing deer or wild animal. It's so distinct. So sharp. So inescapable. You can imagine the handkerchief over the noses. And I imagine Jesus let the horror of

that smell reach their nostrils and let them think about what that smell meant.

And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

Now, what do you think happens when Lazarus hops out of the tomb?

- What happens to all of that doubt?
- What happens to all of that sadness?
- What happens to all of that heartbreak when Lazarus comes out of the tomb?

Does it not vanish the moment Lazarus pops out?

- All the sorrow,
- all the loss,
- all the heart-brokenness,
- all the doubt,
- all the fear,
- all the accusations against Christ and whether or not he actually cares

- and whether or not he actually loves and
- whether or not he actually is who he says he is

It all vanishes when Lazarus, still wrapped in grave clothes, hops out of the tomb alive, resurrected from the dead.

Now it all makes sense, all their questions are answered, all their doubts assuaged, all their concerns and hesitations gone in a flash. That, my friends is resurrection power at work. When at least we see God's answers, God's solutions, God's reasons, it's all made right.

Finally verses 5 and 6 make sense. Before we could have never seen how it could be that God could claim to love Mary and Martha and Lazarus and yet purposefully let him die. I have the assurance of your love on the one hand but then the absolute abandonment of you on the other. But now we see. You didn't abandon me. You were there all along. Now it makes sense.

When we say, it all makes sense, what do we mean? What we mean is that we now see how the goodness of God and what appeared to be the abandonment of God go together. The story isn't over until the full resurrection power of the gospel completes the story. God is in the business of restoring and resurrecting brokenness. He is the business of redeeming and transforming brokenness.

You see what we celebrate Good Friday and Easter is the turning of evil into Good. If the greatest evil in the world, the killing of the son of God, could be turned into the greatest good, could not God redeem and resurrect your problems as well? Could he not even now begin changing and forming you into something new?

# The Resurrection is About Dealing with Real Stuff.

I want to remind you of something that often gets overlooked in this whole idea of resurrection. Mary and Martha had the right answer. Lazarus would one day be resurrected in some future moment. Where did they get that? From the OT.

We studied Psalm 16 which has an allusion to this. As part of David's view toward hope he says,

Psalm 16:9-10, Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure. For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

What is David doing here? He's looking forward to resurrection. That word corruption is literally the word for rotting and decay. What is David saying? He's not going to rot in the grave. Of course he will. His father and grandfather and ggf and gggf are bones. But he is looking forward to real physical resurrection.

But he was looking forward to eternal resurrected life.

And let's be clear what we mean by eternal life. What we mean is real life the way God intended it to be. We are not talking about some kind of soulish experience that somehow extends beyond physical life. When Lazarus was resurrected, his physical body came back to life. Think about what the word means.



You can see that the word originally came from a latin root from which we derive the word resurgence. The idea of a resurgence is that you take the same material and it surges forth with new power and new strength. So you have the resurgence of an idea or the resurgence of political party. It's not that something entirely different was created, it was the same thing that now has new power. It's a resurrected idea.

And so it is with the idea of bodily resurrection.

When the disciples and the early Christians thought in terms of resurrection, they did not think in terms of ghosts living on. What they thought is that something entirely new had happened.

Honestly, think about what the words of Paul mean in Colossians 1:17-18

Colossians 1:17-18, And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (ESV)

Listen, people in NT times believed in life after death. That was almost universal. The question was not life after death. The question was always resurrection. Do you think that your body will rise back from the life after death state in which it exists? The answer of Colossians is yes! Your body will rise back from the dead. The evidence for this of course is the resurrection. Jesus is the first version of this, the first experience of it we've ever had. The word first implies second and then a third and then a fourth any many more to come.

The Resurrection narratives are not a picture of survival after death; they record how a totally new mode of being has arisen in the universe. Something new had appeared in the universe: as new as the first coming of organic life. This Man, after death, does not get divided into “ghost” and “corpse”. A new mode of being has arisen. That is the story. What are we going to make of it?  
-C.S. Lewis

What we're celebrating here this morning is not the resurrection of Lazarus, who would die again, but rather celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ that shows us, reveals to us as Christians:

- that death is dead, and
- sin is defeated forever, and
- the hope of the future has been pulled into the present.
- We're seeing this and feeling this, and the greatest evidence we have is the Spirit of God working among us.

One of the greatest claims of Christianity is that Jesus has conquered death. In other words, that there is exists a possibility of life after death. That when you die, its not just over, that when your molecules get turned back into dust that this is not all there is, that your existence continues forward.

That is by the way, why you should care. Maybe there are some here today that would say, I really don't care what Christianity has to offer. Well that would be crazy, who wouldn't care about having

quality eternal life. That would be, like, really cool.

As you age this becomes more meaningful. You can feel your body aging can't you. This week I was laid up for a full day on my bed because my back hurt so bad. And someone asked me, "Man you okay, what did you do? Oh, I was sleeping."

At our book club this week we were joking about this. When you're young, the world is wide open to you. You can do anything you want. You can make wildly different course corrections because time is on your side. If you want to become a doctor, well then do it. Want to be a fighter pilot, go for it. The world is before you. But as you age, the world starts closing down.

I realized just recently that I am passed the age I can be an olympic athlete. I'm too old. It can never happen for me. Some of you are looking at me like, "Dude, you never could have been an Olympic athlete. Who are you kidding?" Let me live my delusion. Let me down slowly.

As we get older the world starts closing in. And pretty soon you get to the point where nothing is certain. You don't take any risks longer than a day because you just don't know what tomorrow holds. You work yourself into a tizzy at the thought of buying green bananas. Which one is going to go bad first?

Well one of the claims of Christianity is that Jesus conquered death. There is eternity ahead of me!

Ultimate restoration is coming but we can press into that foundation even now. Jesus said, I am the resurrection and the life which means that the foundation of Christianity, really, is there person of

Christ. And I invite you to test that foundation by pressing into him. Test his claims.

Ask other Christians who have tested His claims. Ask any follower of Jesus, "Where would you be if Christ had not saved you? Who would you be without Christ?"

I can tell you just personally, Christ has changed everything in me. We opened by talking about testing the resurrection power of the gospel by pressing into it. I have pressed into the gospel with all my guts and it has changed everything about me.

- my marriage
- The way I love my wife to
- how I see my children and engage with them to
- The infusing of my life with purpose and meaning.
- How I spend my money to
- what I think about friends and their place in my life to
- how hard I work.

## Poem

O How glorious and resplendent Fragile body, shalt thou be, When endued with so much beauty, Full of health, and strong and free! Full of vigour, full of pleasure, That shall last eternally.