



Easter 2017
Best Day Ever
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Good morning and happy Easter. Have you ever had a song in your heart? Just something playing over and over again in your heart. And it's a great day when this song just pops up and you start singing it. If you're raising your hand, you know I'm going to call on you. Somebody sing me their song. Just yell out your song. Living on a Prayer! Somebody said that in the first service! You are My Sunshine! I got that in the second service. He's alive! I downloaded that on The Gaithers today just so I could hear that song. It's only a 42-minute song, but if you can get through the whole song, it's a great song. What a Beautiful Morning. My mom used to sing "This is the day, this is the day that the Lord has made..."

I'll be honest with you, when I'm having a really good day, this song pops into my mind and heart and it's not a spiritual song. I brought the lyrics. When they show up on the screen, I want you to sing it with me if you know the song. It comes to you by theologian Travis Tritt. Here's the song right here:

*And it's a great day to be alive
I know the sun's still shining
When I close my eyes
There's some hard times in the neighborhood
But why can't every day be just this good*

That is a song! I wear my wife out with that song. She will hear me in the shower singing *I got rice cooking in the microwave...* And then when my kids hear me singing *I might go get me a new tattoo...* It's a real quality song for your kids to be singing.

We're talking today about great days, but we're talking about The Best Day. I thought we would just find out what some of your great days were. I had a great day last year. Can you say amen to this? The Cubs winning the world series! It was a great day! Right, Russell? Yeah!

Do you want to know a great day that's coming to Branson, Missouri? How about this? The Dunkin' Donuts opening! That's going to be the best day; oh, that's going to be awesome. If you're looking for where I'll be studying, it will be Dunkin' Donuts, but only on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday. I won't be in there on Friday. It'll just be those first four days.

How about this one. This is a great day. Receiving a settlement after they drag you off a plane. You know what's great about y'all. It's not too soon for this group. I had about six people unfriend me on social media this week because they thought I was being insensitive.

Listen, I grew up Baptist; getting dragged down an aisle doesn't intimidate me one bit. I've been drug down more aisles with no settlement. Did anybody see the attorney in Cook County, where they are going to be filing the suit? He was giving a press conference. The had the Wall Street Journal, the New York Times, and everything in between. They attorney was talking for about 30 minutes and he couldn't take the smile off his face. He was smiling the whole time. They asked if they would be filing suit and he said, "Well we don't know for sure yet." You liar!

I was on a flight Thursday and I told Amy... She asked me what I was going to do and I said, "I'm going to go in and I'm going to put my bag in the overhead and I'm going to lie down on the floor. That's exactly what I'm going to do because they're committing to never drag someone off a plane again and I'm thinking that's going to be a problem; we're going to take advantage of that. So, if I'm not here next Sunday, it's not because I'm in jail. The term for it is retired. I'll be retired.

How about this one? Your wedding day. Wow, the settlement got more than the wedding day. That's a problem folks. I've got to be really honest with you, my friends.

How about this? The birth of your favorite child. That was a great day.

Now give it to me on this one. Your child graduating and leaving home. That's a great day, except for the mom graduating her last child next month. They don't want to talk about it. Sonya Hayter, when their last child left home, came to me and goes, "I don't want to hear it. I don't want any jokes. Don't even think about it." This was in May. I wasn't allowed to speak to her in May, June, July, August, September. In October, she came up to me with the biggest smile on her face and said, "I just want you to know I'm healed."

If you're brand new to Woodland Hills and you're visiting today, we want you to know that at this church, every generation matters. Sometimes you might hear a church say it's all about the next generation, investing in the next generation. It's not just about the next generation; it's about every generation. And every generation honoring every generation. A couple of weeks ago, we honored Gene and Norma. They're actually in Texas right now, celebrating their 70th wedding anniversary, so we honored them. We honor parents and when we dedicate children, the parents and the children come up on stage.

We're doing something for the very first time starting next Sunday. It's something we've never done at Woodland Hills. The team has been working very hard to put all of this together. We're going to do a six-week series targeting and speaking directly to the Millennials. We're going to call it those 18 to 30 years old. Here's who needs to be here: If you're 18 to 30, definitely be here. If you have children or grandchildren who are 18 to 30, definitely be here. If you have children that you're one day going to see turn 18 to 30, you need to be here.

We're calling the series *The Adventures of Mike and Mandy*. I didn't even come up with the title; we let the millennials title it. I love the subtitle and this is what we really want to get across. *Life Starts Now*. We want young people to really understand that from the heart of this church, we're not interested in just preparing you for the next season; we're interested in you making the most out of this season.

Too many times, talks about the next generation and talking to young adults, it's like we're getting them ready for it. No, we're getting you ready for now. Life starts now. We're going to be talking about your relationship with Christ, your relationship with your parents, your relationship with the opposite sex, employers... all of that. We want to really cover that as we ask you to make some serious decisions about your life. I hope you plan on tuning in or being a part of that starting next week.

Let's talk about some very serious great days. How about the day of your salvation? That was a great day. The day someone maybe drug you down an aisle. The day you placed faith in Jesus. Faith alone in Christ alone. You put the world behind you and the cross before you and you've been charging ahead ever since.

How about the day of a family member or a friend's salvation? Someone you've been praying for, for a very long time, someone you have been sharing Jesus with, but they still believe it's about them doing something, starting something, or stopping something in order to have salvation. You've been pleading with them that it's about faith alone in Christ alone. For by grace you are saved through faith that's it's not of works so you can't boast about it.

There's another great day that we've been talking about and that is the day you come face to face with Jesus. Those clapping are our six senior adults that are a part of this service right now. They think about it a lot. If I were to bust out *Beulah Land* right now, they'd all be like "Take me there!"

Why are we here today and why are there so many people here today? Why is this crazy, packed, with over 3,000 people at Woodland Hills... Why is this happening on Easter Sunday? I believe this is why many of you are here today. We don't see you a lot of other times during the year, but it's on this day, Easter, that we are reminded that **Jesus still breathes life into dead souls, dead people, dead marriages, and dead families.** We are reminded on this day that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that's available to you today, at this very moment. And what we say around here...

I love talking to a wife or to a husband who tells me their marriage is too far gone. You came to the wrong place and the right place. It's kind of hard to explain. Here, we're never going to give up on your marriage. You're like, "Well, my marriage is dead." Jesus breathes life into dead people. Jesus breathes life into dead marriages. "Ted, it's too far gone." Listen, I hope today you're reminded, at Easter, follower of Jesus, that you're never too far gone. I hope that if you've never placed faith in Jesus that today, you learn and you proclaim with your mouth Jesus is Lord because you've said it's too far gone, it's been too long. You're never too far gone and it's never been too long because Jesus breathes life into dead people.

Today, we're not talking about great days; we're talking about The Best Day Ever. We're talking about a day that Pentecostal are still dancing down the aisles over and Baptist are still amening over and Presbyterians are still studying and Episcopalians are still toasting and Catholics are still standing, kneeling, standing kneeling over and the Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons are still thoroughly confused over.

But that's why we want to look clearly today at the story of the resurrection, but then we also want to talk about what would happen to our lives, to this place, what it would look like had Jesus not been raised from the dead, as Paul presents that to the church at Corinth.

We are going to start in the gospels. If you have your Bibles, turn to Luke 24. You can follow along with me. I'm not going to go through the whole chapter. I'm going to kind of summarize it up to a point. I'm going to summarize it up to Verse 36 and let you know about the events of the day, what happened on Sunday morning. Friday, Jesus died and was buried. Saturday, silence.

Sunday is where we pick up in Luke 24. ***1 On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. 2 They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. 5 In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead?***

9 When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven (the disciples) ***and to all the others.*** So, it wasn't just the disciples that were hearing this, but many others were hearing this account. ***11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like... watch the word the Bible uses. ...nonsense.***

13 Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus... Luke is the only account we have of this; it's not in Matthew, Mark, or John. There were two of them who had just heard about this story where Jesus was raised from the dead. They were going to a village called Emmaus ...***about seven miles from Jerusalem. 14 They were talking with each other about everything that had happened.*** Can you imagine that conversation? ***15 As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; 16 but they were kept from recognizing him.***

So, these two guys were walking and Jesus joins them, but they don't know it's Jesus. ***17 He asked them, "What are you discussing together as you walk along?"***

They stood still, their faces downcast. Here's kind of the face they were making when he asks "What are y'all talking about? What's this discussion?" I don't know if he said, "What are y'all talking about, but I'm paraphrasing it for my Ozarkian friends visiting this morning. They are down cast and their looking at each other like *where have you been?* ***18 One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you the only one visiting Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*** "Where have you been? Have you been living under a rock?" to which Jesus said, "Yeah."

Then, these guys give the gospel. ***"He was a prophet..."*** They're going to declare to Jesus who he is. ***"...powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. 20 The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; 21 but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. 22 In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning 23 but***

didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. 24 Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see Jesus."

As they get to their destination, Jesus was just going to act like he's going on to another destination, but he stops and sits over a meal with them and then vanishes, leaves. This is where we are going to pick up the story. If you're following along on the screen or in your Bible... ***While they were still talking about this...*** Now the disciples and the other are discussing what's happened and the events that have taken place and now the story they have. Even the ones who haven't been to the tomb yet are discussing this and making sense out of all of it and He shows up. ***Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, "Peace be with you."***

Just a pause here. I think there are some right now, in life, that all you need today is to leave with this one main point. ***Jesus showed up and said to you, "Peace with you."*** That's all. You've come here to learn, you've come here to meet someone, you're scheduled to go to a buffet or the Keeter Center afterwards... You've got plans. But, today, I would hope that the Holy Spirit calls you by name on this issue. Jesus showed up and said, "Peace be with you."

37 They were startled and frightened, thinking they saw a ghost. But, now Jesus is going to show him his hands and his feet. The point of that is to say, "I'm not a ghost, I'm not an apparition, I'm not a hallucination. **38 He said to them, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? 39 Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."**"

40 When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. 41 And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them... And I love my Lord and Savior. He said, "Do you guys have a snack?" Isn't this fantastic? I think this is why some of you became Baptists. If you really think about it because if you notice all of these defining moments in scripture how many of them happen around a meal, around just getting together and having fellowship. ***"Do you have anything here to eat?"*** Scholars also believe this is another proof of the fact that this is the physical body, the resurrected body of the Lord Jesus Christ where there now is food. **42 They gave him a piece of broiled fish, 43 and he took it and ate it in their presence.**

44 He said to them, "This is what I told you while I was still with you..." Jesus predicted his death and resurrection. The New Testament speaks about the resurrection of Jesus in over 300 verses. Now he's going to say even in the Old Testament. ***"Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me..."*** And this is a summary of the entire Old Testament. ***"...in the Law of Moses, the Prophets and the Psalms."*** You've got the Old Testament, you have the teachings of Jesus. He predicted it.

I love what Pastor Andy Stanley, from Northpoint Community Church says. He says, ***"If a man can predict his own death and resurrection and pull it off, I just go with whatever that man says."*** We will follow that man who can do that.

Paul comes to the church at Corinth and he's going to teach them because there's some confusion and misunderstanding about what happens to people when they die. Where do people go? The biblical term that we'll see is "fall asleep." It's a word picture for death. But, he doesn't say Christ was raised so... What we are going to look at today is him saying, "Let's just think about what would happen had Christ not been raised from the dead," and he gives up multiple points to consider.

If Christ has not been raised and he is still dead and he is still gone, our preaching is useless. I know some of you believe that with or without the resurrection about my preaching, but you're just going to go along with it while you're here on Easter. But, can I just say this? Our time here together today, had Christ not been raised from the dead, has no purpose. We're wasting our time here if Jesus has not been raised from the dead. And for your faith. The practice of your faith has no purpose. But what we've learned is **the resurrection of Jesus brings purpose to your life**. We believe when you place faith alone in Christ alone, your life now has meaning that it didn't have before.

Survival vs Significance. There are some who live life thinking it's just what happens upon this earth. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes, refers to it as "under the sun," which is our time upon this Earth. Moses actually said, "Seventy years you have upon this Earth, eighty if you're strong, but those years are filled with sorrow and anguish. There are those who just live in survival mode. They just have to get by day to day. But, when you place faith in Jesus, everything about your life has meaning and purpose and significance. Why? Because it's not about you. Your life has a completely different direction to take and you're not longer living it for you.

Just so you know, as a church, we're not into the survival mentality. We've never once taught here for you to go home and create a bunker at your house and fill it with end of the world stuff to survive the end of the world. We don't believe we'll be here. But, my son got into it a couple of years ago. He went to the Coleman store with his buddy Owen Brawner and got one of those water purification straws because we were going camping. He wanted to drink right out of the creek or out of the river. I'm like "There are cows upstream; let's not do this."

But, he got it. I didn't know he had opened it. Travis (Owen's dad) and I were sitting around the campfire and we looked towards the water and Owen and Carson were sipping the water out of Taneycomo. I asked Travis, "Are they going to get gonorrhea?" Now half of you laugh and the other half are going "I don't know. Can you get gonorrhea from Taneycomo?" No, you can't. It's another... Anyway, I'm not a doctor. I don't know all the medical stuff. I kind of freaked out.

Travis goes, "I hope not!" Then I looked at Carson and I go, "You don't need to learn how to do that. Jesus coming, but we won't be here." So, I'm never going to scare you to death and start selling you things to survive.

For some of you, it's like paycheck to paycheck, day to day, and you don't see any other meaning, purpose, or significance. Listen, when you place faith in Jesus, the resurrection power of Jesus living in and through you brings significance to your life because it's no longer about you. What that means is you're here today to **worship**. That's one of the purposes of your life, to bring glory to God. You're here to fellowship, to spend time with other believers. It's about discipleship, about learning because Jesus

pulled off his death and resurrection as he predicted, so we're going to believe what he says and we're going to learn what he said. What did Jesus teach? We want to take on the life and practices of Jesus. We want to take our lives and go out and evangelize, meaning we want to share our faith with people who do not know the Lord.

Then we want to do **ministry** and ministry is the significance of going out and ministering and loving people in the name of Jesus. Your life is not just about survival.

I had a friend text me last night. He's 74 years old with throat cancer. He just went through his radiation and he texted me, "If you have a sec to talk, Ted." I called him and it was a 15-minute phone call. I thought the whole purpose of the phone call was going to be for me to pray with my friend, to ask him how the treatments are going. He's been unable to eat and he's lost a lot of weight. He called to let me know he was coming to church this morning. He came to the 9:00. We didn't talk about Joe once. He said he was there with Linda, his wife, and they were chit chatting back and forth all throughout these treatments.

He called and spent 15 minutes to tell me he knows how important this morning is. He spent 15 minutes to tell me how important this church is to the community of Branson and Stone and Taney Counties and the work that's going on. This is what he said. We didn't talk about him at all. I tried to get information about his treatments and here's what he said: "I'll be at the 9:00. Maybe we can put our heads together and pray for someone else in need." That's a man who really understands this isn't just about our 70 to 80 years upon this earth. This is about me doing something with my life. Joe knows however much time he has left, he's going to make the most out of it. The most out of it means giving it away to others and moving in others.

We move on. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul says, **17 And if Christ has not been raised...** Think about that for a second ...***your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.*** You're still hopeless and lost. The biblical language for those who have not placed faith in Jesus is "you are of your father the devil and a child of darkness." He said had the resurrection not taken place, that would still be the case for every single one of us in here.

Let's move a little bit deeper into 1 Corinthians 15. **The resurrection of Jesus gives us victory over sin.** How does it give you victory over sin? First, it **removes the penalty of sin** automatically, immediately, right on the spot. If you place faith in Jesus, you declare Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead... The scripture says for the penalty of sin, the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. In other words, you are automatically, immediately removed from the penalty of sin when you place faith in Jesus.

Then, you're given the power to overcome sin. If you believe this, say amen. One day, every follower of Jesus in this place will be freed from the very presence of sin. It won't be anywhere in your life or you won't be dealing with it at all. At the moment of salvation, you're freed from the penalty of sin. As you go throughout life upon this Earth as a follower of Jesus, you're **free from the power of sin.** You have the power to overcome that struggle that you're dealing with.

Then, one day, you won't even have that struggle because you'll be **freed from the very presence of sin.**

Where do we get this victory? Further down in 1 Corinthians 15, it says, **56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law.** **57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.**

Back up to Verses 18 and 19. **18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.** If Christ has not been raised from the dead, those who have died are lost. **19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ...** If only we worshipped him here upon this earth and then that was it, **we are of all people most to be pitied.**

The resurrection of Jesus frees us from the fear of death. We do not fear. Jesus says this in John 11: 25, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."***

This is why Comedian Tim Hawkins says, "I can't wait for my funeral. I'm going to put the fun back in funeral. When you come to my funeral, I'm going to have a big bowl of Tootsie Rolls sitting on my stomach. Wouldn't that be great. You walk by my casket and go, 'Oh, poor Tim... Oh, Tootsie Rolls.'" That's what he wants. He said, "Wouldn't it be great while you're reaching in to the bowl I grabbed your arm?" That would be a great moment. You may feel he's insensitive like that guy that got drug off the United flight. Do you know why we can talk about death that way? It's because we have hope. We don't fear death.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul is explaining this to the church at Thessalonica and he says mourn, follower of Jesus. If you lose someone close to you, mourn. That's what all of us do. That's part of being human. But there are only two ways to mourn. You mourn with hope or you mourn without hope. The reason we are able to mourn with hope is because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

This is what we want to ask you today as we close out our time. In Romans 10: 9, it says, ***If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.***

And when we go back to talking about great days, we're talking the Best Day Ever, but when we talk about great days, we're talking about the day of your salvation which is going to create a great day for someone else who is here with you today. It's the salvation of a friend or family member.

I went back this week because I was studying my roots. I don't know why there was another song. It wasn't just rice cooking in the microwave and a three-day beard that needed to be shaved. I went back to my roots. I grew up independent, fundamental, pre-millennial, King James Version only Baptist. I've been drug down more aisles than I'll ever be able to count. But, this hymn came to mind and I've been singing it. I want to put a couple of the lyrics up there for you to hear.

*What a day that will be,
When my Jesus I shall see,
And I look upon His face,*

*The One who saved me by His grace;
When He takes me by the hand,
And leads me through the Promised Land,
What a day, glorious day that will be.*

For those of you right now struggle with pain, struggling with sickness, listen to this.

*There'll be no sorrow there,
No more burdens to bear,
No more sickness, no pain,
No more parting over there;
And forever I will be,
With the One who died for me,
What a day, glorious day that will be.*

I'm going to ask that you bow your heads as we close out our Easter service and our Easter morning at Woodland Hills. If you're dealing with sickness, pain, mourning the loss of a family member or friend, like my friend Joe said to me last night... I had him up here during the 9:00 service. We just invited people to stand right where they are and allow this church body here in the castle and over at the Chapel to pray over you, to speak a blessing over you. And if you would like this church family to pray healing in your body, healing in a relationship, again, Jesus breathes life in to dead people and Jesus breathes life into dead marriage and dead relationships. You're not too far gone. But if you would like us to pray over you, I'm just going to invite you to stand right now and just remains standing where you are and let this church body pray for you.

Over in the Chapel, I have a friend, a young man named Travis who is standing. He's in the back. I asked his family if it was okay to do this and they said it was. Travis has always struggled with his vision. He's been visually impaired, but last week he went totally blind. Travis, I hope that your standing and knowing that this body here and I know at the Chapel as well is praying over you. I'm going to pray, but I'm going to ask you to pray for those around you as I pray.

Father, it's in the name of Jesus, through the authority of the name of Jesus, through the power of the blood of Jesus that we pray for those dealing with cancer. As they go through treatment or whatever the doctor is recommending, we pray that the report will come back with a zero count in their cells for cancer, that they would be right now speaking the name of Jesus out loud over that.

For the one broken now in a marriage, I pray that today they would realize they are not too far gone and the marriage is not too far gone. There is hope. As long as they are breathing, there is still hope. I pray that they would cry out and speak out loud right now the name of Jesus over their marriage, over the relationship. We pray over the heart failure that I know many in here have been dealing with, the congestive heart failure that we've seen in every service this morning. Just people struggling in their senior years. Father, I pray for wisdom for the doctors and for treatment plans and for all of that.

This church family gathers around them and above all of that, pleads the name of Jesus and pleads the blood of Jesus over them. We're asking that you cover them in the blood of Jesus, protect them from evil, and fulfill your purpose in their lives.

I'm going to ask that you remain standing. And I'm going to ask here and at the Chapel and even online. If you've never placed faith in Jesus, Easter Sunday is a great day for life to be breathed into your dead soul. With those standing around you already, I'm just going to invite you to stand. I'm going to lead out in a prayer so that you can personally pray that today would be your day of salvation. I'm just going to allow you to stand.

If you would, just pray this prayer. Father, I know that I am a sinner and I have been trying to let my good behavior or stopping my bad behavior be my salvation or my church attendance be my salvation. Today, I renounce all of that and I place faith in the resurrected Jesus alone for my salvation. Jesus is Lord and I believe in the resurrection of Jesus, that he was raised from the dead.

If you prayed that prayer, we believe that with that decision in your life, you are now a follower of Jesus, you are a Christian. Father, it's in the name of Jesus, we are grateful for all that you have done across this campus this Easter, reminding us that we are not still in our sins, that we are not to be pitied for just life upon this earth, but there is life well beyond throughout all of eternity. We're grateful that our faith has meaning and purpose, that our preaching and our time together here on Sunday has great value. May we continue to walk in that and lead in that in this community. For those who have placed faith in Jesus across this campus in our three services, we pray that today would be a great day they don't ever forget. We are grateful for our time. It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.