



Easter 2018
The Resurrection Changes Everything
Pastor Ted Cunningham

I woke up this morning at 3:00 am. Was anybody up that early? The 11:00 service, no you weren't up at 3:00. If you're up at 3:00... You're a middle-aged man like me. I know we have to look at our watch before we drink anything in the afternoon. It's kind of a tradition for me. I pull the phone out, I put the earbuds in... At 3:00 am, I'm trying to be very quiet because Amy is still sleeping. I start every Easter Sunday that early, it seems, listening to David Phelps and the Gaither Vocal Band sing *He's Alive*.

Have you ever been in a coffee shop or somewhere where someone has headphones in and they're singing to the music they're listening to? Does anybody know what I'm talking about. I'm trying to be as quiet as can be, but when I hit this part in the song: "He's Alive! He's Alive! He's Alive! And I'm forgiven. Heaven's gates are open wide. He's Alive! He's Alive!" So, Amy joined me at about 3:15 am. I tried to make it a personal worship service.

How many of you know what song I'm talking about? It should be on your iPod today. There you go, there's a middle-aged man again talking about the iPod. It should be off Don Francisco, but you've got to get the David Phelps version. He's the only guy that can hit that note at the end. Luke could hit that note at the end. But, when David Phelps gets to the end... And I think I can do it and I try with the headphones in.

It's Peter's song. At that time of the day, he hears the feet rustling outside. He thinks it's the sound of soldiers' feet and he goes to the door and it's Mary. They go and inspect the tomb and I mean just that day from Friday, the darkest day in history, to today, the greatest day in history. I love that Saturday early morning into Sunday early morning and just what was going on in the hearts and minds of the disciples at that time. And then to know this time, where we are right now, and everything that was happening. With that, we celebrate the empty tomb.

As part of our worship, we take an offering here at Woodland Hills Family Church. As those buckets come around, we encourage your generosity. It's been an interesting start to the year. We had about three weather Sundays. Our attendance has been swinging anywhere from 150 people on Sunday to 2,000 people on Sunday. You've made up for the struggling Sundays to support the ministries here, around our community, around the nation, and around the world. For that, we are grateful.

We want to invite you back next week as we start a new series. We're going to be going through the book of Nehemiah, through April and May, as we look at the rebuilder of walls and lives. A lot of times, maybe you've been in a church where they did the Book of Nehemiah and it taught a lot about

leadership principles or maybe your church was going through a building campaign and they were using this to talk about building. It's the rebuilders of broken walls and lives as Nehemiah goes to rebuild the walls of the city. I brought it to the team and said, "And here's what I want to call the series: *Build the Wall*. I wanted to call it *Build the Wall And make Babylon Pay for It*. You can't get anymore culturally relevant than that. The entire creative team and the staff, every single one of them, shot me down.

So, here's the title of our next series, starting next week: *Home Town*. It's a big difference from *Build the Wall*. Keep them away. It's *Home Town – Love Where You Live*. We're not doing a series for tourism. It's wherever *you* live. In this church, our church family, we say Southwest Missouri, but it's all the way from Springfield and Nixa, down to Harrison and Omaha (not Nebraska, Arkansas). All the way from Taneyville and Bradleyville to Crane and Hurley and Hollister. Wherever it is you find yourself, our desire through this series is that you become a life-giving person for your community.

I don't know if your new to Branson, but you may have picked this up from people that have been here a little bit. There are some jaded members of our community. You can pick up on this tone. I love everything about Branson. I've been here 17 years, but sometimes we can become jaded towards the problems of our community. There can be fighting over the next steps for our community.

Nehemiah asked two questions about the city in Chapter 1 – "Tell me about the people. I want to know about the people and I want to know about the city. The people are disgraced, and the walls are broken down. And with this, he mourns and he weeps and he fasts and he prays. The goal of this series is that you and I would develop a heart for our community, develop a heart for those that we call neighbors, that we would love this place. Some of you are like, "I am leaving this place." Some of you are like, "I'm not from here, but I'm now here." Some of you were born and raised here and this has been home your whole life. Wherever your coming from and now you call Southwest Missouri home, our desire is that we would develop a heart for our neighbors, a heart for our community.

This journey really started for me this past summer. I've been here, like I said, 17 years and just dealing with the poverty issues and the homelessness in our community and the drug addictions and a struggling economy in some of the cities. We spent some time in Rockaway Beach. I just said "Lord, I pray that I would have a heart like Nehemiah had for the people, the rebuilding of the city, and the rebuilding of the people." I'm hoping that you will take that journey with us, starting next week.

If you're brand new to our church, the only thing really different for us about today is a lot of people. It's a lot of people, but it's the same message. You're not getting a message today that we only give once a year. This is our regular message because we desire to be a church, we desire to be a family, a community of believers where we know Christ and the power of his resurrection. We want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and something we say often around here... We don't allow the word *hopeless* around here. We don't allow people to say, "You know that guy over there? He's a lost cause." "You see that couple over there and you know what they're going through, right? Yeah, there's no way that marriage can be saved." "You see that father/son over there? They haven't talked for years? It's done."

We don't use words like that around here because **we believe Jesus breaths into dead people, relationships, marriages, and families.**

Today, Easter Sunday, he is risen. We proclaim not only the resurrection of Jesus, but the power that comes with the resurrection of Jesus. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that's available to us today.

This is what the Apostle Paul says in Ephesians 1 and it's been my prayer for you: ***18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, 19 and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is the same as the mighty strength 20 he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms...***

I want to encourage you, if you get time... I don't promote a ton of movies, but you need to go see the movie *Paul*. There isn't a lot of CGI and there aren't going to be any transformers and cars and all of that, but if you want the tone of the New Testament, I think that movie does an excellent job.

I went with Amy and Carson to watch this movie. In that movie, you see it all over Paul as he's spending time with Luke: the joy that is set before him. He is soon to be put to death for his faith in Jesus and there is great joy. As he develops a relationship with the prison warden and shares the gospel with the prison warden. Moments before his death, you see them shake hands... We don't hear what he's saying, but I know he's speaking the life of Jesus into this man. Carson is watching it with me and it's a heavy movie for him to see. I looked over and him and I go, "You see that. Paul is excited – to die is gain. Look at that."

My kids tell me all the time, "Dad, you talk about your death literally every day. It's exhausting us." Just so you know, if you're new here, my funeral is so planned, and it is awesome. I tweak it every now and then if new songs come out, but the kids know. First of all, I'll have a funeral at 3:00 and 8:00 right here in this theater. We're going to have two parts, so catch which ever one you can; whatever fits your schedule. Carson is going to say the first words at my funeral. Whether it's tomorrow, which it could be, or whether... Some of you are thinking, "I think you're really looking forward to this, aren't you?" For the joy set before me? Yes! Go watch that movie.

Carson is going to deliver the first words and he laughs about it, but whether it's tomorrow, 20 years from now, or 40 years from now, Carson is going to stand up at my funeral and go, "Well, the day my dad was so excited about it finally here. We're finally here." I've told him, "That's the first line, as you speak hope to a group of folks who gather. Say nothing of me, Carson, speak of the savior."

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that raised your lifeless soul and it's the same power that raised my lifeless soul. Two thousand years later, we're still celebrating the resurrection of Jesus. Two thousand years later, the Pentecostals are still waving their arms and dancing about it. The charismatics are still shouting about it. The Baptist are still amening it. The Presbyterians are still studying it. The Episcopalians are still toasting it. The Anglicans are still chanting about it. And

the Roman Catholics are still standing and kneeling, over and over, about it 2,000 years later. Why? Because it's the same power available to us today.

Some of you know the story, but you don't have the power. Some of you have heard this narrative that we're going to share today. You've heard it, but you've not experienced it. And you're here today... This place is packed. There will be over 3,000 people on this campus and will lose about 1,200 next week. It's because you've heard the story, you know the story, but you haven't experienced the same power that was exerted to raise Jesus from the dead. You haven't experienced it in your life.

If I can talk to those who have professed faith in Jesus, you've placed faith in Jesus, you call yourself a Christian, I want to ask you about the quality of your faith today. How would you describe your faith? Maybe some of you would say, "**My faith is shaky.** It depends on how the day's going." Some of you say, "My faith was really good until I got that doctor's report." "My faith was going well until I heard my dad's doctor report or my mom's doctor report." "It was going really well until my husband left me." "It was going really well until my son/daughter said they want nothing to do with me." You've allowed your faith to be established by how life is treating you. You allow your faith to be established by the circumstances that hit you. By the way, these same circumstances hit us all. We all experience the loss of a job, the loss of finances. Some of you have experienced bankruptcy; you're morally bankrupt, your financially bankrupt and your faith is shaky based on the circumstances.

Others would say, "**My faith is seasonal.**" "Ted, I just have these really strong times and then weak and then strong and then weak... I can go for months at a time and really be going after it and then something happens, and I just fade away, I drift away."

After the first service this morning at 7:30, a gentleman visiting our church came up to me and said, "You know, I didn't drift for weeks or months; I drifted for years." That may be the story for some of you. It's not like the changing of the season, but more like years. You made a decision to follow Christ, you made him the Lord and Savior of your life, but you just started kind of drifting away.

There are others who would say, "**My faith is steady.**" And you know what? They are all around here. I'm looking around right now. I just see long term believers. Some may have only been saved for a few years, but from the moment of their salvation, their faith in Christ has just been unwavering.

I've had hospital visits this week. I've visited in homes. Not to say names, but his initials are Bob Copeland. I love that man. I know he's watching online because he can't make it in. Bob is dealing with congestive heart failure. I'm sitting there, "Why is it I can go into some rooms, I can visit some homes and there is great joy at these moments." Bob and I were telling jokes and he was belly laughing for the better part of an hour yesterday. I was thinking this is good, but I've been in the rooms where it's death and there is no joy. I go over to the joy. Why? Because there is a steady faith.

I'm telling you, in this movie *Paul*, you're going to see it. There's this looking up and being like the time is almost here. When Paul and Luke are discussing about Christians... This scene has been in my mind all week of a mom with her arms around her son as they are led out into one of Nero's circuses to be slaughtered by animals.

And when word gets back to Paul that Nero had another circus, Paul just kind of smiles and goes, “What a glorious moment that must have been when they were face to face with the savior.”

Why is it when I’m in a room with people with this steady faith and then I go over here... Do you know why? It’s because this room over here has no hope. They’re clinging to this life. And over here they’re going, “Life under the sun. I’m grateful for the time the Lord has given me, but I can’t wait to be with the Lord.”

If you’re struggling with that shaky or seasonal faith and you’re wondering how to get that steady faith, I love what Pastor Timothy Keller says as we talk today about this. He says, *“It’s not the quality of my faith; it’s the object of my faith that holds me up.”* Your faith is a report card on all the stuff you’re doing and all the stuff you’re not doing in church attendance and giving and all of that. You need to move your focus today from the quality of your faith – shaky or seasonal – and move it to the object. And the object of your faith is Jesus Christ. Turn your eyes on Jesus.

I go to Acts 2. I’ve been there all week and again, *He’s Alive* still coursing through my veins here, but how can Peter, the one who denied Jesus, speak this first sermon on the day of Pentecost – when the church is being launched – with such authority. He has authority and power. He has to lead off the first sermon of the church. The Day of Pentecost, he has to lead off, explaining to people... This is the introduction of his sermon: “No, we’re not drunk.” How’s that for an introduction? It’s because the Holy Spirit fell upon them. They are speaking in tongues, tongues they’ve never even heard before, but this is happening among the believers. The promised Holy Spirit has fallen upon them. People look at this from the outside in and they think they are drunk. Peter says, “We’re not drunk.” And he launches into this message and it’s in Acts 2 that he proclaims.

32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. To begin the morning, I read 1 Corinthians 15. You read in there that Jesus appeared to the disciples and then he appeared to over 500, so hundreds and hundreds of people witnessed the resurrection of Jesus. They saw the resurrected Christ. ***33 Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.*** “We’re not drunk; we’re filled with the Holy Spirit.”

36 “Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified...” This is very important as we look, in a moment, at repentance. ***“...both Lord and Messiah.”*** “You know the awaited Messiah? You put him on the cross. You crucified him.”

37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” “We crucified the Messiah.”

38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.” Repentance, as we are going to see in a second, is changing the course of your life and baptism is the first step of obedience. You step into the water and this is an outward expression of inward faith. It’s a decision you’ve made to follow Christ and, in a moment, many will get into these waters and will proclaim to all of us, “I have decided to follow Jesus. I have declared Jesus is Lord. I believe he has been raised from the dead.” They have proclaimed that, they believe that, they

are now Christians, and they will take a first step of obedience as they step into that water. ***“And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.”***

We believe we are saved by grace. For by grace you are saved through faith. It's not of works so that no one can boast about it. This is a free gift, not to be confused with a cheap gift. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Pastor and theologian, called cheap grace *“the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance.”* Or the offer of forgiveness... You can be forgiven for all that you've done wrong, all of your past sins. He's saying it's when you offer that, but you don't tell people to change the course of their life.

When Peter uses the words repent and be baptized, here's what *repent* means in that text. It means to have a change of heart. Not just to be sorry for your sin, but it's to reverse the direction of your life. Think about who he's preaching to. He's preaching to the ones who put Jesus on the cross. He's saying, *“That's the Messiah, turn from that and turn to him, changing the direction of your life.”*

40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” 41 Those who accepted his message... Those who became Christians. ...were baptized... They stepped into the water to make a public profession, a public proclamation of their faith. ...and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

I don't know what intimidates you or throws you off, but for me, it's anytime I'm around someone in a position of authority. I get pretty intimidated. My kids asked me a couple of months ago, “Hey, Dad, how often did you go to the principal's office?”

I said, “Which grade are we talking about?” I go, “I couldn't count for you how many times I went to the principal's office. Sixth and seventh grades were really rough years for me. My parents prayed for years, “God, redeem his mouth.” I had one goal in going to the principal's office. I wanted to negotiate whatever I needed to negotiate so they would not call home. Can I get an amen on that one? Let me tell you something, I got good at it.

I loved when Bryan Bronn stood up here and declared that he was the principal of the junior high. There were a few cheers and a few jeers. There are parents out here that think he's the problem. Ha! That's a whole other series. Come back in the fall; we do a family series to let parents know it's their fault. Anyway... That was totally a joke.

Nine out of ten times, I could convince that principal to not call home. Give me double detention, do what you've got to do, but just don't call home. I don't know if they still do this, but when I was a kid, they would call you over the PA system so the whole school knew – there's that peer pressure – I was going to the principal's office. Then all your other classmates are scoffing you and making fun of you as you're headed to the principal's office.

I still get that feeling when I get pulled over by a police officer. Does anybody get that feeling when you get pulled over? I have to remind myself that I'm 44 ½ year old.

How many of you have traveled internationally? So, you've been in front of a border patrol officer. This is not the TSA. A border patrol officer from another nation. You've got to be in the nation you're going to and then back home. I've never been more intimidated. The principal's office is nothing compared to standing in front of a border patrol agent. They don't put their bullet proof vest under their uniforms; it's on the outside and it's very thick. They have a hand gun, a taser, clubs, and zip ties. If you're not intimidated enough, they have the lanyard with the fully automatic machine gun hanging down the center, talking to the Cunninghams about what we're doing in their country. It seems like a little too much power to find out if we're bringing in undocumented cheese.

My daughter has a guilt prone nature like I have a guilt prone nature. My son and my wife, not so much. The border patrol officer becomes a fun game to see how bad they can make Ted and Corynn feel. But, I've got the passports and I've got all the documents and I'm ready to go. You don't know what questions they're going to ask. They want to know, "Why are you in our country?" We got one guy... He had the haircut, he was buff, he had a machine gun, he had his weapons and here we are, standing in front of him.

He said, "Where are you going?"

"We're going to The Hague."

"What are you going to do down there?"

"We're going to behave; that's what we're going to do down there." That's like the first thing out of mouth. I'm wanting him to know. "One hundred percent, right kids, we're all behaving, right? And Carson just shrugs his shoulders. It's that moment when you're standing in front of authority and the questions coming at you.

If I can take you to a day sometime from now when you will stand before the Lord. Every single person in here will. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess. I'm speaking now the person who has never placed faith in Jesus. You'll one day stand before the Lord and I've got to tell you that he's not going to ask you, "How do you think it went down there?" He's not going to ask you, "You think you did well? I know your 20s and 30s was a rough patch for you, but ultimately do you think your good is outweighing your bad?" He's not going to pull out your file just to see... It's not A, B, C, D, or F and if you get a passing grade, you're in. It's called The Book of Life. The Book of Life is a record of all the saved. How do you get your name written in the Book of Life? It's through the object of your faith and that is Jesus. It's not the quality of your faith. It's not how many times you attended church. It's not how much you give. Not any of that. It's did you receive the sacrifice of the Lamb, Jesus?

The scripture says this in Revelation 20: ***15 Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.***

You'll stand before the Lord, the book will be opened, and it's the record of the saved. If you're name is not found in there... There are only two places to spend eternity. One is with the Lord, in the presence of the Lord, enjoying a fulfillment of our time with the Lord, the joy of the Lord, eternity with the Lord.

The other is separated from the Lord in the Lake of Fire. The scripture is very clear. No intimidation needed. I know there's the doctrine out there that some folks have accepted, to say it will all get figured out in the end. You'll have a last chance in the end. That's not what the Bible teaches.

Jesus said, ***"I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die..."*** They will have the joy. It will be that room I walk into at Cox and know that there are only days left, and the joy, there's joy. How do you receive the Lord? How do you know that your name is written in the Book of Life?

Romans 10: 9 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.*** Focus on the object of your faith, not the quality of your faith. With the quality of your faith, you want to talk in terms of what it is we do. That's an overflow of our salvation, not the source of it. Church attendance is an overflow of our relationship with the Lord. Giving, tithing 10% of my income and giving offerings above that, that's an overflow of salvation, not the source of it. Serving, as we just came out of a series on serving and encouraging and loving and praying for one another, is the overflow of our salvation, not the source of it. The source of my salvation is Jesus. And I declared him Lord. I believe he's been raised from the dead.

As 1 Thessalonians 4 says, when we lose someone, they've not perished. If Christ has not been raised, they've perished, but since Christ has been raised from the dead, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord, and so I know I will see my loved ones again one day. And the scripture says we believe Jesus died and rose again and because of that, we don't mourn like the rest of men; we mourn with hope.

If you've not made this decision, we're asking you right now over at the chapel and here in the castle and online, that this would be the day of your salvation where you proclaim Jesus as Lord. He's been raised from the dead. You confess your sins. You repent of your sins. And in repenting of your sins, you change, you reverse the direction of your life. There are many ways that seem right to a man, but in the end, lead to destruction. You've been going down a destructive path because your life has been all about you. In the end, it leads to death. But today, professing Jesus as Lord and believing that he has been raised from the dead, you change the direction of your life.

As the scripture says, that day, thousands repented, and thousands were baptized. We've been doing something around here called spontaneous baptisms. If today is the day of your salvation... Maybe you've become a believer in the last few weeks or months and if you say, "I want to be baptized on Easter Sunday," we want to give you that opportunity. You step right back here as we begin baptizing. We'll give you a shirt. We left the tags on this one to prove to you this is not like a hospital gown; we're not reusing this stuff. You take these shorts. We'll give you a towel. You'll have everything you need to go home dry. You may think this is way too many details going into this, but I was told after the first service that we needed more details to make it clear as can be for those who want to be baptized.

As worship begins, we're going to invite you to step out. There will be people at that door if you don't want to come up this way. I just want to encourage you that I think it's better if you walk right down this center aisle, walk right up these stairs... Travis is one of the nicest guys you'll ever meet on the planet.

High five the worship team on your way by. Say, "I have decided, WOO!" Then you go back there, put on the outfit, and get in line. We are just going to take our time baptizing this morning. What a good morning for you to make this decision, profess your faith publicly, and to step into the water.