



Easter 2019
Why Easter? Because He Lives
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Today, we're looking at this simple question: Why? Lots of times, we ask why and we don't need to even take it to the Lord. I was a prayer group leader at Liberty University, and we had this student on our floor that would come into every prayer meeting and say, "Would you guys pray for me? I'm failing my classes and I don't know what the Lord is trying to teach me." As the leader, I got worn out. I finally told him, "We're not going to pray for you anymore until you start studying." And all God's people said... Amen. "We don't have to ask the Lord why. You're not studying; that's why you're failing."

I meet with couples who don't know why they are broke. Okay, I'm just going to help you with that one. Dave Ramsey has built a whole ministry off of this. You are spending more than you make; that's the answer to that question. Sometimes these questions are so simple to figure out.

It's like this guy here. Maybe you've seen this video of the guy getting bitten in the face by a snapping turtle. To paraphrase our friend Paul Harris. If you get bitten in the face by a snapping turtle, you deserve to get bitten in the face by a snapping turtle. How many of you are with us on that one? Yeah, you're too close, right? You have to back up. It's ridiculous.

Some of you bring much bigger questions today and we want to answer them in the next five weeks. We're starting a series here on worship, starting next Sunday, that will take us all the way to Memorial Day. You have questions and we're glad you're here, we're glad that you're making the start of your Easter day right here at Woodland Hills. But you bring questions like this: **"Why is life so hard?" "Why can't I seem to get ahead in relationships and job and business?"** "Every time I try to do the right thing and I try to take a step forward, I just get knocked down." You may have the question: **"Why do bad things keep happening to me?"** Beyond the studying, beyond that broke illustration, you want to know why this is still coming at you and why we would cover this in a worship series. It's because we're going to continue to worship even when we don't have all the answers to what's going on with us right now.

Some of you are scared for the future. We may have some preppers in the room. You're like, "I don't know what's coming. I'm getting a little nervous. Remember in the 80s when we used to go out in the hallway and put our heads down between our knees to protect ourselves from nuclear blasts. Does anybody remember that in the 80s? And the teachers never did the drill. Teachers never got down and did the drill, leaving them completely exposed to death because we were protected in the hallway. I remember in the 80s that people were scared. We were in the middle of the Cold War. People watched Red Dawn one to many times. They were scared for the future.

Some of you bring heavy questions in here today. **“Why did God let my loved one die?”** Beyond that question, you’re asking **“Is there life after death?”** **“What happens when you die?”** Then some of you are here today because a family member brought you. You make Easter a special time on your calendar. You’re going to go to lunch after this, but you have this view of God that he’s mad at you. He’s ticked off at you. He wants nothing good for you. So, you're asking the question **“Why does it feel like God is distant and angry.”** Even if in the next five weeks we look at this question and answer it for you, you have an even bigger question. **“What does God expect from me?”** **“What does he want from me and from my life?”**

We’re answering these questions in a series that we’re calling *Why, God?* It’s very important, as you share this on social media etc., that you remember the comma. How many of you believe commas have a very specific use? A lot of people. The grammar police are in this service. You're the ones that always text us about our spelling. How many of you think you can use a comma however you want? That’s me. It’s a breath. It just gives you a breath in the sentence. Throw it in whenever you want. That’s kind of how I do it. Editors tell me I’m wrong.

But this is very important. We’re asking God why? It’s different than Why God? That is questioning the existence of God. So, we’re not doing a series at Woodland Hills, questioning the existence of God for five weeks. We’re asking him why? Commas are important. For example: Let’s eat, Grandpa. This is an invitation to take your grandfather to Cracker Barrel. That’s different than: Let’s eat Grandpa. It’s very important you know the comma for the next five weeks. We’re taking our big questions to God. As we wrestle with those questions, we will worship. We will worship our Father in heaven with these questions.

Today, we’re not asking Easter why? We’re asking *Why Easter?* And the answer is simple. It’s because He lives. And all God’s people said... Amen. Jesus borrowed everything. He borrowed a manger to be born. He borrowed a place to sleep to lay his head at night. He borrowed a little boy’s lunch. He borrowed a boat to go across the sea. He borrowed a boat to preach from. He borrowed an animal to ride into Jerusalem. He borrowed an upper room for the Last Supper. Today, we are celebrating the fact that he only had to borrow the tomb because he needed it for three days. We are grateful.

Today, we want you to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus, as we talk about it today, as we look at, as we understand it’s purpose in our life, is not just for what happens when you die, it’s for how you live now. It’s for life upon this earth. Jesus said, “In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart, I have overcome the world” We’re talking about the power of the resurrection in your death, but also in your life. We want you to know.

This week, as I was preparing, I pulled up Easter 2013 notes and 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and I got a little nervous because all the messages looked a lot alike; they were very similar. That’s why I threw in the snapping turtle; to mix it up a little bit. I kept going back to... It’s similar, but different and then when I read the words in Acts 4, it brought great comfort to me because this is what Woodland Hills wants to be all about all year long. ***33 With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.*** That today, Easter 2019, we will continue to testify to the resurrection of Jesus.

When you come back next week, guess what? We'll be singing, we'll be worshiping, we'll continue to celebrate and worship and praise the resurrected Jesus. They continued to do this. The scripture goes on – ***And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all...***

If you're visiting today, or maybe this is your first time or you haven't been here for the last 42 weeks, we've been going through a series on 1 Corinthians 13: 4-7 as our outline. It's actually been the last 11 weeks. A couple of chapters away from that, Paul is going to address the Church of Corinth. They have some questions about people who have fallen asleep. Fallen asleep is the biblical word picture for death. And they have questions about that. What happens to believers in Christ when they die?

Paul comes in in Chapter 15 and here's how he starts that chapter. ***3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance... Get this, hear this, understand this, apply this to your life. ...that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures... He prophesied of this, we read about that in the Old Testament. 4 ...that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures... We're going to see in a second the same power that God used to raise Christ, that he exerted to raise Christ from the dead is the same power that is available for us today to raise us from the dead, to raise dead marriages, to raise dead people, to raise dead and lifeless souls. 5 and after that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, 8 and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.***

As Paul would proclaim the message of the resurrection, one of the passages we have in scripture from Acts 17 has him speaking to the men of Athens, a place that would pride itself on intellect and the ability to communicate. He stands before them and he's disturbed with what he has seen in the city. He sees gods and idols set up everywhere. To those who don't know, he's going to proclaim the resurrected Jesus. He presents the gospel to the men of Athens and he says, ***28 "For in him we live and move and have our being."*** As he presents the risen Christ to them, the resurrected Christ to them, there are three responses. I submit to you that today, at our church, between 8:30 and 10:00 and 11:30, over at the Chapel and in here, we'll probably see all three responses.

Here's how they responded after they heard about the resurrection of Jesus. ***32 When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered... They laughed, they said, "This is ridiculous." ...but others said, "We want to hear you again on this subject."*** That has to be some of you. That's why we put this series starting next week. It's because today is a spark for you. It's going to get your questions going. Maybe you heard some of those questions and you're like, "Well I didn't even have those questions, but now I do." Now you're a spiritual seeker, wanting to know what it means to follow the resurrected Jesus.

How did these people that gathered at this church and called this church their home worship through difficult times? How do they worship at a funeral? How do they worship when someone dies, fallen asleep? You start to have these questions and today, you may not place faith in Jesus. We hope that you do. But we hope that you come back and continue to seek, continue to ask the questions. That's the second group.

33 At that, Paul left the Council. 34 Some of the people became followers of Paul... Other translations say people joined him that day **...and believed**. We're hoping that, through three services in both of our locations today, there will be many who place faith alone in Christ alone at our church.

We took the hymn, *Because He Lives*, as our outline for this morning. How many of you remember that hymn if you grew up in church? You can still sing it. You could close your eyes and you didn't even have to think about it because those words are still in your heart. Here's why we say, "Why Easter?"

Because he lives... I can face tomorrow. I have hope for tomorrow. I'm saddened today in our country because it seems like every week, I'm hearing about a young person who takes their own life. Lots of questions hit me like, "How come nobody knew of it if they did know, it wasn't addressed." "When did that person lose hope?" "When did that person begin to think, *Tomorrow offers me nothing.*"

We believe because of the resurrection of Jesus, there is a tomorrow. Here's what we offer today. We offer **hope not hype**. I'm not really a hype guy. You can probably tell. I get excited, but you didn't see a video advertising our services with me going, "WHAT'S UP, WOODLAND HILLS!" That's not who I am. I don't do a video every week before the message like, "THIS IS GOING TO BE THE MOST AMAZING MESSAGE THAT'S EVER BEEN DELIVERED!!" That's hype. And it's not. I want to be honest with you. Lower your expectations. I don't understand the pastors that want to raise our expectations and then disappoint us when they're done with their service and you leave going, "That was okay. I don't know if I'd call it epic."

But we're into hype. You know hype comes from the word hyperbole, which means exaggeration. I don't believe in exaggerated stories, by the way... But Jesus used hyperbole; that's my excuse. Jesus told stories, but he exaggerated in a story to make a point. But now we see people hyping their lives, presenting themselves in a way that's not true to what's really going on. We see it all the time. That's you; you're exaggerating your life. You're hyping your life, but you have no hope. You hyped your wedding, but you don't have any hope for your marriage. You put a ton into that. There were pictures and people and you're still talking about the wedding. "It was incredible and I'm a princess..." But now, a year or two later, you've lost hope for your marriage.

Some of you hype your children online each and every day. You're constantly putting the highlight reels of your children, but deep down, you're going, "I don't know if I'm doing this parenting thing right, but I'll just let everybody think I am." And you hype, hype, hype. We don't want to offer you hype today. We want to offer hope. And we find that in the scripture.

Some of you hype your life with the clothes you wear and the cars you drive and the house you live in and the vacations you take. You want everybody to think you have it going on, and you are awesome, and you've got it together, but deep down, you have no hope.

Paul, to the Church at Ephesus... This is one of my favorite texts on the resurrection of Christ. Here's what he says, and we understand how God raised Jesus from the dead, the Father raised Jesus from the dead and that power that raised him from the dead is the same power that's available to us today.

Here's what it says. ***18 I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened...*** illumined, open, that you would begin to understand. ***...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...*** His mighty 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...***

That power is available to you today. You're like, "I don't have hope for my family." The resurrected Jesus is your hope. "I don't have hope for my marriage." I see this play out a lot. I'm an advocate for young marriage. I believe you can get married young, but I work with a lot of people who got married young, started a family right away, and now they find themselves in a place where they feel, in their late 20s, like they missed out on some of the stuff early 20s should be doing. "I'm going to leave my marriage, leave my kids, and I'm going to go have that fun I should have had right out of high school or right out of college." And you're giving up on your marriage. Today, I hope you leave with the hope of the resurrected Jesus for your life, for your marriage, for your family. You're like, "It's too far gone." Well, let's just say it's dead. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that can raise your dead marriage, and it's available for you today. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow.

Because he lives, all fear is gone. Are you a fearful person? Some of you have the **fear of condemnation.** "When people find out who I really am... That's why I spin all this hype out there, Ted. I don't want people to know what's going on." "I'm broke, but I bought a new boat on credit because I want people to know I'm cool and I'm out on the lake this summer." "I don't have any money, but you should see the new outfit I just bought." Your hype, hype, hype because you're afraid if people see you for who you really are, you will be condemned. Well, there's good news for you. For those who are in Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation. For those who have placed faith alone in Christ alone, that fear can be gone.

How about this? Some of you have a **fear of the future.** Part of it is you fear the future because you don't know what it is, but even if you think you know what it is, it frustrates you that you can't control it and you've been trying. You hype your life and then your spinning life, trying to be in control of every detail of your life and everything that's going to take place tomorrow.

Some of you have a **fear of death.** The scripture says because of the resurrected Jesus, because Jesus died and rose again, the believer mourns with hope. We don't mourn as other men who have no hope, we have hope.

This church lost a dear friend and a leader back in January. I shared it with you briefly, but I want to tell you the rest of the story. Jim Sedlacek was an elder at this church for years. He left Woodland Hills to move to Phoenix to be with his kids in his final years. As he and Judy moved out there... Judy passed away not long after moving to Phoenix. Jim went to be with the Lord this past January. His last visit here... Jim and I would always try to get together. When I was in Phoenix, I would want to have coffee with him. His last visit here, he ended up in the hospital and I went to visit him. Jim would always refer to any ailment going on with him as rust. When I would try to talk to him about what was going on with him at the moment in the hospital here at Cox, he would just say, "Let's not talk about it."

Jim and I could speak about death not with fear, but we could do it through laughter. We could joke with one another. Why? Because we know where we will spend eternity.

I don't feel like I've ever really had a fear of death. There were a couple of times my mom gave it to me a little, tiny bit, but it wasn't ever like long term, residual fear of death. When I got the word that Jim passed away, I smiled, grateful that he was in the presence of the Lord. Then I talked to his kids several times after that. We were talking and sharing Jim stories.

The day before Jim died – he was having a lot of problems with his heart – he went to the hospital and the doctor said, “We’re going to need you to stay overnight, Jim, and run some tests. I’m not liking what I’m seeing.” And Jim said, “Oh, no, no, I have to go.” And the doctor said, “No, you need to stay.” Jim said, “I have a bunch of stuff in my garage that I have been waiting on the Salvation Army to pick up. They have canceled three appointments on me to pick it up. I have an appointment tomorrow at 9:00 and I ain’t missing my appointment for the Salvation Army to pick up my donations.”

So, Jim, like some of you in here... I’ve been there when you’ve done it. You’ve signed that AMA. If you don’t know what an AMA is, it’s against medical advice. Jim went against medical advice so he could get home and be there so they could pick up his donations.

He goes home and the next morning, he wakes up and he knows it is not good. He calls a friend because his kids are out of town. His friend comes over. She sees Jim and says, “I’m not comfortable with driving you to the hospital; I’m calling an ambulance.” She calls the ambulance and while she and Jim are sitting on the couch talking, the ambulance pulls up. His friend says, “Jim, I’ll be right back. I’m going to go greet the ambulance and bring them on in.” She greets the ambulance and, as she comes back in, she immediately knows that Jim is in the presence of the Lord, that he has gone to be with the Lord.

I can speak about this with such great joy, but here’s where I laugh out loud. As I was talking to his son Scott, he said, “Ted, as we got here and were cleaning up Dad’s estate, we were looking over the messages and everything. The first message I found that morning on Dad’s phone was from the Salvation Army, canceling their pick up. With that I laughed out loud because... This has nothing to do with the Salvation Army because there is a time to be born and a time to die.

This is why we do not fear death. How can we say that? Look at what 1 Corinthians 15 says. Now remember, he’s presenting the resurrected Jesus. This is why the men of Athens and those in Corinth sneered at him. **12 But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?** Had Christ not been raised, you and I go into the ground and that’s it; it’s over for us. **13 If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. 14 And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless...** Here’s what one pastor said earlier this year, “What we’re doing here today is a terrible hobby.” The preaching of God’s word means nothing if Christ has not been raised.**and so is your faith. 15 More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either.**

17 And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile... You're wasting your time here. You don't even need to ask those questions that we talked about at the beginning of the message. ***...you are still in your sins.*** But because of the resurrected Jesus, our sins are forgiven. And all God's people said... Amen. ***18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost.*** And if this is the case, look at what he says in Verse 19. ***19 If only for this life we have hope in Christ...*** If only for right now, ***...we are of all people most to be pitied.*** But the resurrection of Christ gives you power in this life. It gives us a future. It gives us a hope. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. Because he lives, all fear is gone.

Because he lives, my life has purpose. The scripture says you're here upon this earth for 70 years, 80 if you're strong, according to Psalm 90. So, you keep asking these questions. "Okay if my life has purpose..." Here's some of the questions we're going to dig into over the next few weeks. "What am I here for?" "What is my purpose?" "What does God want from me?" "What is my purpose in life?" "Why do I feel empty and unfulfilled?" "Why, even when I begin to make the step, am I always feeling so empty?"

Here's what we see often and some of you can identify where you're at as we launch into this series next week, Why, God? Some of you are living at the survival level. It's day to day. It's about staying alive; there's no purpose; you don't invest in other people, you don't serve, you don't give. You get up every day and think about yourself and how you're going to live. We call that the survival mode. Some of you have had some success. You're not day to day or paycheck to paycheck; you found great success, but I can tell you that I've met a lot of successful people who have not found their purpose in life. They have a lot of money and they've built a lot of great businesses, but they're missing this last one, which is what we call significance, purpose, meaning.

You were made to worship. You were made to be in fellowship with other believers. You were made in the image of God. You were made to invest your lives into other people. You've moved from survival to success, but something is still wrong. Something is still empty. We want to cover what it means to have a life of meaning, a life of purpose.

I'm glad that you have chosen to worship with us today and I hope that you plan on returning next week. I have to be honest with you. We asked our church a couple of weeks ago to please come to the 8:30 and they did. They came to 8:30 and that's why many of you couldn't get in. They were all here at 8:30. That service was packed and standing room only. A lot of them came to 8:30 and said, "Yes" because they wanted to make room in this service for you. They are glad that you're here. They want you to enter into a relationship with the resurrected King. They want you to know what it means to have a life of purpose because of what Jesus did for you. Jesus died on the cross for you. He was buried, but only for a few days. And then he was raised from the dead.

Today, we celebrate that because the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that gives your life meaning, the same power that gives your life purpose, the same power that wherever you're at, whatever you're struggling with... it's what our team is going to be doing down here. They want to meet with you. They're here to answer questions and help you. I'm going to invite you to stand. We're going to pray as we close. If you're at that point where you have more questions, please come forward and meet with our prayer team.

As we pray together, I hope... I want to invite you back next week to be a part of us answering some of these difficult questions as we worship as a church family.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we're grateful for the meaning that comes to our lives because of the resurrected Jesus. We celebrate Jesus today, grateful for a church family that understands that and has opened doors up today, and we're grateful for the guests that are here.

I pray there may be some that sneer or laugh, thinking there's no purpose or meaning in this. I ask that the Holy Spirit call them by name. For those who are seeking and have more questions, I pray that they would continue to pursue. For those right now who are ready to confess with their mouths and believe in their heart, I pray that they would call upon the name of Jesus and declare that Jesus is Lord and find salvation today.

We pray all of this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.