



Easter Sunday

The Good News of the Resurrection

Pastor Ted Cunningham

As part of our worship, we take an offering every Sunday at Woodland Hills and if you are new, we want you to know we love cheerful giving, we love generous giving, and all of the giving goes to support ministries here in this church family, out into the community - and we consider our community Southwest Missouri and Northwest Arkansas – and taking the gospel to the ends of the earth. So, thank you, church family, for how generous you've been this year. And to our guests, we are glad you're here. There are four ways that you can participate. You can give in offering boxes that we have located in the foyer. I know we have some outside as well. You can also go to the church Center, hit Give Online Now at woodhills.org, or text any amount to 84321. Again, thank you for your generosity.

Today, as we celebrate The Good News of the Resurrection, I know that there are a lot of guests here today and many of our church family have invited folks, and I never take that lightly. I want to take it very seriously because some of you may have walked in here today with a grandma, a grandpa, a mom, a dad, a son, a daughter, an aunt, an uncle, or a co-worker. And you may have had the thought, *Lord, please bridle Ted's tongue and let him just put some of the stuff he does aside and get very focused and on task today.*

For the last couple of years, Amy and I have had dear friends in this town that we've been talking to about the church and inviting. In January, I was walking through the lobby and saw one of them. I'll be honest with you. I got panicky. I'm back there kind of dancing around and I'm texting Amy going they're here they're here. I was like Woody in Toy Story. "Andy's coming! Everybody places!" And the T-Rex is hitting the wall and Mr. Potato head can't find his ear. I mean it was chaos. I go over to the friend... and then I saw a church member coming that says inappropriate things. I'm like *let's stay away from the person right there.* Let's look over there.

So, I understand those who are here today, and we want every guest on our campus to leave here today knowing that you matter to god and you matter to us, and we're glad you're here. We have a lot to celebrate today. He is risen, the tomb is empty, my sins are forgiven, my life has purpose, there is life after death, and that is why we're here celebrating the resurrection of Jesus today. And when I think about who is on campus and who is watching online, I would say we want to speak to two people today. Both of them are skeptics. One is skeptical that the resurrection actually took place. I don't know how many of those would be on campus today, but they're questioning whether or not Jesus is real, what his death means, and if the resurrection even happened. But then there are a lot of believers who are skeptical, not of the event of the resurrection, but they're skeptical and live out in their lives with a questioning of the power of the resurrection.

To the first one today, I want you to know if you are skeptical of the event of the resurrection, I want you to understand this about Christianity. Christianity does not require that you check your brain at the door. You can engage your intellect. You are going to see today in the text the empty tomb, the eyewitnesses, that you would just explore this today, and be open to the evidence. As we look at it, I know... And I say this to our church from time to time. Don't be so open-minded that your brain falls out. But we want to engage the intellect today.

We are going to start in John 20: 1-8 – **Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. 2 So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, (John) and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!”** This is important to understand because the Old Testament prophesied to it, Jesus predicted it to his disciples and followers, and yet the question is still there. What happened to Jesus? Where did his body go? Even after he told them, they didn't have full, complete understanding.

3 So Peter and the other disciples started for the tomb. Now I want you to get this detail and if you don't smile when you read the bible, I'm telling you you're not reading it right. I love god's word and Verse 4 is one of the reasons I love it. This is what John says. **4 Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.** He has to make the point. I outran him. Isn't that just like a man? I outran Peter. **5 He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. 6 Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, 7 as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus' head.**

So, imagine now what's going through Simon Peter's mind. It's like, *what has happened here? If you are going to steal a body, why are you going to leave the clothes? Why wouldn't you take the clothes with the body?* So, imagine everything that's taking place and he's wrestling with in his heart and mind. **The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. 8 Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.** I love this. It all came together, everything that they had been told. You see they saw the empty tomb before they saw the resurrected Jesus.

I don't know if you get junk mail at your house. I'm kind of shocked that they still send junk mail. But years ago, I used to get this letter in the mail. I still get it; I just don't fall for it anymore. But it was a letter that looked like it came from the IRS. And every time I'd get it, I would have that feeling, and then, to make it worse, I have a guilt-prone nature. I grew up independent, fundamental, premillennial, King James Version only, Baptist, so very guilt-prone. In the lower lefthand corner of this IRS-looking letter, it says, "Final Notice." I would rip into that thing. *What do I owe? What happened? What went wrong?* And then it's an advertisement for bell-tone hearing aids. I opened that exact same letter six times over the course of the year. I've decided too that when I'm old and need hearing aids, it won't be a Bell-Tone because I'm so ticked at these people. I just laugh because one day, I'm going to get a knock at the door, open the door and it's going to be two guys from the IRS. "We've been sending you letters.? "No, you haven't." I threw them all away.

But this week... it was a very, very emotional week, a week to pause and I listened to some Easter sermons from the past from preachers that I love and respect. One that I listened to was from the late Timothy Keller, preaching Easter in the middle of New York City. I encourage you that if you are looking for something to watch or listen to, maybe google that and find that service because in the Middle of

New York City... and I don't think I have to say this very often, but New York is a little different than Branson. But what you get when Timothy Keller is preaching is that he is contending for the gospel. He is declaring the gospel. He used the illustration... He talked about his junk mail situation, but then he talked about if you were to get a letter today from a Lawyer's office and it had the name of the lawyer's office, you could tell it was official. It wasn't a form letter, it was something that was sent out to everybody, but it was direct to you, it was typed out, and you could tell it was personal, that would give you enough pause to open it. Then you open it and you read in there to you personally that you are the last or oldest heir in your family and the one before you had just passed away and they left you this sum of money. Please call this number if you would like to claim the money. Now, you're going to investigate a little bit more to see if it's real and to see if it's true. Tim Keller used that illustration and I want to use it today to encourage you. Keep moving forward, keep asking questions, keep investigating. If you're the skeptic, look to the evidence and give it an honest look. Don't stop, don't pause.

In First Corinthians 15, the Apostle Paul says this to the believers in Corinth: 1-4, ***Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you...*** Every January/ February in staff meetings, the staff will look at me and they'll be like "Hey, what's your topic for this Easter?" I say the same thing and have for 22 years. I tell them, "We're going with the resurrection. That's the topic for this Easter. We're not going to get too creative, we're not going to get too fluffy, we're going to proclaim the resurrected Christ, the empty tomb, our sins are forgiven, our life has a purpose, and heaven is our home. We don't need to fear the future, we don't need to fear condemnation." So today, for the believer in here, we need to be reminded of the gospel. We're reminded of what Christ did for us.

He said, ***I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, Which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved...*** Heaven is your home, your sins are forgiven, ***if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you.*** Now this is important because Chapter 15 is all about the resurrection and he actually shares that because of the resurrection of Christ, this is what it means for you and he then he does the opposite. He said had Christ not been risen, this would be what's true of you. And he's saying the resurrection of Jesus is every bit a part of the gospel message. Hold to it. ...***Otherwise, you have believed in vain.*** If you don't believe the resurrection, you can't believe in Christ.

3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance... Here is the gospel. ***that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures...***

Now, we just ended worship singing a new song for our church. We sang it last week. And there is a lyric in the song that just a lot of us were unsettled with. I just want to say I appreciate our worship team and I appreciate a lot of the leaders in our church who wrestle through lyrics. You know the lyrics of our worship songs are not the bible. Sometimes verses are quoted in them, but they are not the bible, so they can be changed. You're like *you can't change a worship song*. Oh, yeah we can. They change my words all the time. After 8:15, we go back to a debrief back here to talk about the message and they're like "You said that, it made no sense, change it." What we say at this church all the time is, "Scripture drives the bus." We want scripture driving the bus of your home, driving the bus of this church, and experience, tradition, reason, and emotion; all of those are passengers on the bus. They do have influence in our lives, we just don't want them in the driver's seat.

And when it comes to worship, we want scripture, not feelings in the driver's seat. A lot of time, when feelings are in the driver's seat... I know that's what music does for us. Music stirs our emotions, but in worship, our emotions should be stirred for Christ, and for truth.

So, this one lyric... it's not even what was said or meant, but it's what others might hear or believe in singing it that we said Let's just change the one word. So, last week, we sang it like this: *"No matter your unbelief, oh, he's in love with you. From now til eternity, he's still in love with you."* Well, we changed the word *unbelief* to *questioning*. Now, is it true that Jesus loves you in your unbelief? Yes. But what we wanted to be very careful of, knowing the responsibility as a church to put words on the lips and the mouths of people, we wanted to make sure we're having them speak truth. And what we didn't want someone to think is *Hey, Jesus loves me; I'm good with God. Jesus loves me, and it doesn't even matter if I believe*. That is not true. Yes, he loves you in your unbelief, but your belief is what brings you salvation. Believing in the resurrected Jesus. We want scripture, not emotion driving the bus of our worship music. So, we don't check our brain at the door for worship either.

The good news is that Christ died for your sins and in that song, you might think that the all the good news is that Jesus loves you. No, the good news is, yes, it starts with God so loved the world that he gave his son... Amen. Jesus loves you, but he bled and died for you and for your sins, and he was raised on the third day. This is the good news of the gospel. And he rose again for the forgiveness of your sins so that you can spend eternity with him. Your unbelief will separate you from God for all eternity. You must believe to be saved. Jesus loves you in your unbelief, but you're not reconciled with God in your unbelief. To be reconciled to the Father, you must place faith alone in Christ alone.

So, some are here and your salvation for your whole life has been your own way. And you maybe had the be good salvation. You've compared your life to the life of another person to secure your salvation. That's a terrible strategy for salvation. "I'm not as bad as that person, so I must..." No. Or some of you have the try harder salvation. "I tried really hard." The Bible says, For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord. There's none righteous, no not one. For all have sinned. All of us are in need of a savior. You've tried the try harder. It's by grace you're saved through faith. It's not of works. No matter how hard you try, you can't try hard enough to get salvation that comes to you through Jesus.

Some of you have the "attend church" salvation. "Ted, I've been going here a long time. Doesn't that matter?" Not for your salvation. "What about the love others? That love is the ethic of our day. So long as I love others, that must mean something." Some of you are relying on your family traditions. The bottom line is this: All your goodness, effort, attendance, kindness, and heritage have absolutely nothing to do with your salvation.

In Romans 10: 9-10 we read, **9 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 we are praying that many who step on campus, many watching today, will place faith in Christ today and be saved. **10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified...** declared righteous because of what Jesus did **...and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.** So, for the skeptic today who may say I'm looking at the evidence, let's keep going with the eyewitness accounts.

In Acts 1: 3 we read, **3 After his suffering...** After Jesus suffered and died, **...he presented himself...** After he was raised... **to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God.**

In 2020, Amy and I were at the airport. I was sitting at the gate and she went up to refill her water bottle. She came back and I could tell something was different. She goes, "You're never going to believe who is at the next gate. It was one of my favorite comedians, Jim Gaffigan. So, I start walking over. Now, I try to play it really cool around celebrities, okay? I never bug them. Stalk them? yes. Bug them? No. I don't ever want to bug them. But Amy said, "I think it's Jim Gaffigan." Now remember, we were wearing masks at that time, so she couldn't tell for sure. I walked by him, and we made eye contact. That was awkward; especially the second time walking back by him. Just to be sure, I walked by him at least a half dozen times. I only do it to the point I know security is going to get called and then I'm out of there.

But I went back to the gate. Now, I've seen every one of Jim Gaffigan's comedy specials. I confirmed it was Jim Gaffigan. And guess what? We were the only two people.

The eyewitnesses to the resurrected Jesus, hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people, witnessed the resurrected Christ. Chuck Coleson, President Nixon's special council of Watergate... In his book, he said, "I know the resurrection is a fact and Watergate proved it to me. He said, "Because the disciples testified that they had seen Jesus raised from the dead and then proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. They were beaten, tortured, stoned, eventually killed, and put in prison. They would not have endured it if it weren't true. Watergate embroiled just 12 of the most powerful men in washing DC and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. Hundreds of people didn't just see the resurrected Jesus, they heard him speak. Some ate with him. Oh yeah, I saw him yesterday. Keep reading in Corinthians 15: 5-8. **5 and 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...** which is the biblical term for death. **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.**

The proof, the evidence – that you would lean into that today and make the decision – if I believe Jesus has been raised from the dead, I must now ask the question, "What am I going to do with Jesus? Will I declare with my mouth he is Lord and believe in my heart that he has been raised from the dead to be saved?

You may not be skeptical about the resurrection. It's the majority of people that will be on campus today or watching today. You're not skeptical about the event. You believe he is risen, the tomb is empty, your sins are forgiven, there's life after death, your life has purpose and meaning, scripture declares it and you believe it. But you are skeptical about the power of the resurrection. And you use terms often like *impossible*. *Ain't ever going to happen*. Your prayer life has turned into I just lost my job, I don't know what I'm going to do. And on the drive home from being fired, you actually end your prayer by saying, Lord, if you could find me a job making what I was making... but I know it's probably not. We say things like this all the time even if we don't speak it out loud, we think it and we believe it. We use terms like *impossible* and *not going to happen* all the time. So, you're not skeptical or you don't have doubts about a claim or a statement of the resurrection, but you are skeptical that something will

happen. And we believe at this church that the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that raises your lifeless soul. The scripture says, Before Christ, you were of your Father the devil and a child of darkness, lost in your sins. But because of Jesus, the power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that raises your lifeless soul.

That's why we read in Philippians 3: 10, We know Christ but not just Christ, but the power of his resurrection. We want to know the power of his resurrection. The good news of the resurrection reminds us that Jesus still saves people today. People are still seeking Christ today. He saves those who will believe in him and breathes life into dead souls, marriages, and families. So for the addict in here right now who says, "I tried everything. I've been in and out of treatment. I can tell you 12 times... I still go to meetings, but I have relapsed over and over again." You think you are just too far gone. Listen, because of the resurrection, you are not too far gone. There is hope. Don't you dare ever say your adult children are too far gone. Don't let that come out of your mouth.

In the first gathering at 8:15, a grandma came up to me and said "I haven't spoken to my granddaughter in 4 years." There was some sort of falling out, "But she wrote me and wants to reconnect. We've actually been praying for that relationship. Don't give up on your children and your grandchildren. If you believe in the resurrection, you never lose hope. There is always hope. We never, as a church and as believers, bet against hope. That's a bad bet. Your marriage is not too far gone. If you believe in the resurrection power of Jesus, stop saying, "We've tried everything. He'll never change. She'll never change." Listen, he walked out of the tomb. Do you think he can do something with your spouse? I think so. But maybe it's not your spouse. Maybe it's you. I'm convinced he can do something with you. Don't lose hope for yourself, your spouse, your marriage, your mental health. "I've battled this anxiety." "I've battled this depression" "I've battled this eating disorder" "I've battled it my whole life. And I'm never ever going to... this side of heaven I'll always have it." Stop betting against hope. You're not too far gone.

On your worst day.. think about your worst day... that's what I love about the testimonies and the gospel that was proclaimed for our church family today. On your worst day... on the day you feel it is the end... For those of you in here who have thought life is not worth going on, and you've had those suicidal thoughts and it's your darkest day, you're not too far gone. There is hope. Because he lives, I can face tomorrow. There is a reason to get out of bed in the morning. Because he lives, I don't fear condemnation. Because he lives, I don't fear the future. You need to know that your pastor... I fear the future a lot. I'm overwhelmed with the number of people that are on campus, if I'm being honest with you. It's a heavy burden that... And we're headed into an election. And I've longed for a 9:00 and 11:00 service time for a long time. But I fear the future. I fear what can be said about me or done to me.

Listen, if you believe in the resurrection of Jesus and you know Christ and you believe in the power of the resurrection, start praying bold prayers.

Last night, as Amy and I drifted off to sleep... We pray every night before we go to sleep. One of the bolder prayers I had... I said, "Lord, you've got this. You've got this." If you want to know, I'll give you one example of how your pastor is not quite the visionary you might want in a pastor, so don't make decisions until after this message. But I remember when we came to this campus for the first time. I was golfing with some guys in town 18 – 20 years ago. I just remember they said, "You know the church

should consider meeting at Celebration City.” I was like “Celebration city?!” I walked up to the doors outside the castle that’s now Critter Street. There were four guys. We all looked in at the same time. Do you know what my first words about this campus were when I stood on this campus? My very first words were, “Never going to work.” I just want you to know how much of a visionary I am. Everything you see today? God did all this. This most definitely wasn’t me because I can be a skeptic in the power of the resurrection. Stop saying it’s impossible. If you know Christ and believe in the power of the resurrection, there is no such thing as an impossible situation. What God’s done in the life of this church, what I’ve seen God do in family after family after family, and marriage after marriage and individual after individual. You’ve heard testimony of addicts set free. He’s still doing that today and he wants to do that for you.

I’m going to ask that you bow with me and pray... Now I know that at this part, almost every week, everybody is gathering the keys and the purse. Our gathering is not over. But we are going to continue to worship after this so when I’m done praying, I’m going to invite you to stand and continue to worship with us. We are going to pray two things. I want to pray and give an opportunity to the skeptic who has not placed faith in Jesus. We are praying that today is the day of your salvation. That today is the day you repent of your be good, try harder, all your family heritage, love others, church attendance. That you confess all that, that you repent of your sins, you repent of everything that’s taken you down that path and you repent of the ways that the bible says lead to destruction. You repent of that, and you turn to Christ and you confess with your mouth he is Lord, believe in your heart that he has been raised from the dead so that you will be saved. And as I pray that prayer, that you would pray that with me.

And for the believer in here who is no longer praying bold prayers, I’m right there with you. There are times I’m like, “Lord you’ve done enough. I know you’ve done it in the past. I don’t know if you will do it again.” and I don’t want to pray very boldly. Listen I believe in the power of the resurrection, and I need to start increasing my prayer life, praying these bold prayers.

Father, in the name of Jesus, I pray for the one who steps in here today. They’re here with a family. They know this is a check on this Sunday each year and they are completing this and planning a family day together. That today they would have an encounter with the living Christ. That they would confess their sin, repent of the ways they’ve been counting on to be good with you, and turn from their unbelief and believe in the resurrected Jesus today. That they would confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead. We pray that many across this campus and online are praying that prayer right now.

For the mom, the dad, the grandma, and the grandpa who have stopped praying bold prayers because they haven’t seen any results, and they now live in doubt and they are skeptical of the power of the resurrection, that today they would pray the blood of Jesus and the power of the resurrection over that child, that grandchild, that situation, that conflict. And they would no longer use the term impossible situation. Christ has been raised from the dead and his power is at work in me at this very moment.

Father, thank you for what you continue to do at this church. I thank you for every volunteer and every leader in this church that has stepped in today and they are pouring themselves out to welcome guests. We pray that our guests leave today, knowing that they matter to you and they matter to us.

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