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**[Start the timer!]**

**[Slide Title]** We are at the finale of the series called, **The Great Questions of Life**. We have been looking at some of the first order questions of life. A lot of people go through life without thinking about the most important questions. We already talked about: The question of origin: Where do we come from? The Question of authority: How do I know what is right and wrong? The Question of Identity: Who am I? And the question of meaning: What is the meaning of life? The sermons are finally available online. I want to encourage you to view any sermons you missed and share this with people you know who might benefit from seeing it. I know this series have been pretty heavy. It has been an unusual sermon series for me because I spent so much time discussing and refuting various alternative worldview related to this issue. The reason I did that, the reason I spent so much talking about various philosophers and scientists is because I wanted to start from where a lot of unbelievers are. I wanted to show the weaknesses of their worldview and show that Jesus provides the most reasonable and the most powerful answers to the question.

**[Slide]** Today, we are going to focus on the question of destiny: **“Where are We Going?”** In other words, where are we going after death?

This is a critical question. Of course, when all is said and done, the question of destiny will be in all of our minds. Where do we go when we die? As Christians, we believe in life after death. Why? Because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This is at the cornerstone of our faith. Apostle Paul said the resurrection is at the heart of our faith. It is not an optional extra. **[Slide]** In 1 Corinthians 15:14-19:

<sup>14</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith.

<sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. <sup>17</sup> And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are

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still in your sins. <sup>18</sup> Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. <sup>19</sup> If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied.

The resurrection is at the heart of our faith. This is not something that you can disagree on if you are a believer. This is a critical issue for a few reasons; but let me talk about two reasons:

1. It is the evidence for our faith. People often ask me why I believe in Jesus. There are a lot of reasons that I do, but at the heart, it is because of the resurrection. If Jesus really resurrected, then everything he said and taught, and everything he did is really true. He is who he said he was, God incarnate, and what he taught and did have authority in my life, above and beyond my own opinions. Otherwise, it is just another opinion of a good rabbi. His teachings are good, but it's just an opinion of another human being. Ultimately, I am a Christian because I believe that there is good evidence for the resurrection. We'll look at some of them today.
2. The resurrection gives us a unique hope not only for afterlife, but also for our lives now. We will look at some of these things today: The significance of the resurrection to our lives.

**[Slide]** Let's start with the first point. **What is the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ?**

Many of us were told that we have to just take it by faith, meaning without critical examination, in a blind leap of faith. But, that's not how the Apostles approached it. They didn't go around telling people to just believe in the resurrection, as if that was the opposite of reason. They were actual witnesses to the resurrection of Jesus Christ! They provided historical evidence of the resurrection. They were essentially saying: believe because it is true!

Now, it's important to remember that most of the time, we can't do scientific experiments to determine what happened in pre-modern history. There is no way to prove by a scientific method that Abraham Lincoln delivered the Gettysburg Address. We

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know this in fact happened based on historical writings of people who were in the position to know what happened. In the same way, there is no way to scientifically prove that Jesus resurrected from the dead. We have to go back to historic writings of the people in the position to know. So, what are those sources?

If the resurrection of Jesus has adequate historical basis, claims of Jesus are true and Christianity is true. So, the validity of Christianity is not a religious or a philosophical question; it is a historical question. So, I want to briefly examine the question: What is the evidence for the resurrection?

First, there are multiple historical sources in the biographies of Jesus written by Mark, Luke, Matthew, and John, all of which attest to the resurrection of Jesus. (I know some of you are saying, you can't use the Bible as evidence of history. But, you have to understand that the Bible is a collection of letters and books. They used to circulate separately. They are 27 different letters and books. They came together over many years after Jesus. So, we have to look at these writings as separate writings). Now, I know that some secular scholars say that these biographies are not good historical evidence because there are some questions about who wrote them and whether they really were in the position to know what happened. Some of them argue that they are legends made up by the followers of Jesus based on hearsays and written in the second Century. I don't agree with that for a variety of reasons which I can't really get into right now; suffice it to say that even most secular scholars agree that Mark was written around 70AD, and that now we have a manuscript fragment of Mark (meaning actually copies of the book) dated around 85AD. But, we are not going to use that as evidence for now. Let's be generous to the critical secular historians.

Instead, I submit to you a letter written Apostle Paul to the church in Corinth. It got included in the Bible as 1 Corinthians. This first letter to Corinth was written around 15-20 years or so after Jesus. Every serious historian, including non-Christian historians, agrees with this. So, this letter was written even before Mark was written, which people generally agree is the first biography of Jesus written. **[Slide]** This is what Paul said in the letter (1 Corinthians 15:3-8):

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<sup>3</sup> For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, <sup>i</sup> and then to the Twelve. <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, <sup>8</sup> and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born.

After Paul lists the witnesses of the resurrected Jesus, he says many of them are still living. In essence, he is saying, if you want to talk to them about it, you can go talk to them. The Romans created an excellent travel and road system. It was not that difficult to go and talk to the witnesses.

It's not just 1 Corinthians; several other letters of Paul were written pretty early and they all contain language that witnessed that Jesus was resurrected. This is something that secular critical scholars don't dispute.

One thing that can't be disputed by serious historians is that the claim of the resurrection of Jesus was made at least 15-20 years after Jesus during the lifetime of those who witnessed the resurrection.

If you are going to argue that somehow this resurrection was a legend created by the followers of Jesus to help their cause, you have to argue that a legend was created in 15-20 years. There are multiple reasons why those accounts couldn't have been a legend:

**[Slide]** First, 15-20 years is not long enough to create a legend. I got married about 23 years ago. If I told people that my best man got shot during the wedding and resurrected three days later, and I said that in a public document saying most of the people who saw this are still alive, I couldn't get away with this. Legends take much longer to develop.

**[Slide]** Second, the accounts (now, I am talking about Mark, Luke, Matthew and John) are too counterproductive to be made up.

- The first people who saw Jesus resurrected were women. If they were going to create a story, they would not use women because their testimony was

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considered unreliable in court. Why would they say that the first witnesses were women? Because that's how it happened.

- The leaders of the early church--the apostles--look like fools and cowards.

**[Slide]** Third, they are too detailed to be legends.

- The genre of literature of realistic fiction written like history did not exist until about 200-300 years ago. Legends and epics were not written like the way Mark, Matthew, Luke, or John wrote the gospel.
- **[Slide]** C.S. Lewis (medieval literature professor at Oxford): “I have been reading poems, romance literature, myth and legends all my life and I know what they are like and I know that none of them are like this. There are only two possible views on the gospel texts: either this is historical reportage or an unknown ancient writer without processor or successor suddenly anticipated the whole technique of modern realistic novel narrative. The reader who doesn't see this simply has not read.”

**[Slide]** Fourth, I don't think there is a plausible alternative explanation for how the church started. How could 1st Century Jews come to believe that Jesus is God in human form? There was no way they could have. It is blasphemy to believe that. Yet, hundreds of Jews began worshipping Jesus literally overnight. The hymn to Christ as God that Paul quotes in a letter he wrote to Philippians is generally recognized to have been written only a few years after the crucifixion. Is there any other explanation other than the resurrection?

**[Slide]** Fifth, virtually all of these witnesses died for their faith in Jesus death and resurrection. People who make up stories and legends do not die for their fraud.

Now, I know some of you are saying: “There is no way a dead man can come alive.” The bottom line is that if the biographies of Jesus, Mark, Luke, Matthew and John, didn't contain stories of miracles like the resurrection, there wouldn't be any debate about the truth of the accounts. We have more evidence about Jesus than any other person of antiquity. Yet, it is the miracle claims that make many people say that this has to be made up. The most prominent philosopher who made that argument was David Hume.

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He was a proponent of a philosophy called naturalism. He made the most popular philosophical argument against miracles.

**[Slide]** Hume’s Argument: “A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined . . . Nothing is esteemed a miracle if it ever happens in the common of nature.”

Problems with Hume’s Naturalism: He is basically saying, miracles don’t happen because it doesn’t happen. He is saying: the world is a square, and therefore, circles don’t exist. I think the way to determine whether a circle exist or not is to see if it exist, not argue that it can’t exist. Whether something happened or not at a given time in history can be settled only by historical evidence. It’s not really a question of philosophy. He can’t just argue it away.

**[Slide]** C.S. Lewis: “Now of course we must agree with Hume that, if there is absolutely ‘uniform experience’ against miracles, if, in other words, they have never happened, why then they never have. Unfortunately, we know the experience against them to be uniform only if we know that all the reports of them are false. And we can know all the reports of them to be false only if we know already that miracles have never occurred. In fact, we are arguing in a circle.” C.S. Lewis is pointing out Hume’s fallacy in the argument by pointing out that it is a circular argument. You can’t approach an ancient document and say, “well, this contains miracles; so, it can’t be true.”

So, the only way to see if a miracle happened is to examine the historical evidence to see if it is reliable. You can’t just argue away historical evidence by arguing that miracles don’t happen. And I submit to you that if you take the prejudice against miracles away, we have plenty of historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

**[Slide]** Let go on to the second point: So What? What is the significance of the resurrection?

**[Slide]** A. The resurrection shows us that our sins are forgiven.

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We all have things we regret, things we have done wrong. Maybe it is something we did to our family, our children, our parents. Maybe it is something we did to our spouses, girl or boy friend or someone else. Maybe it is something you did to yourself. Ultimately, we've all sinned against God. We've all abandoned him and made something or someone else the source of our worth, value, and identity. We've all abandoned God for an idol. We have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. We are separated from God as a result of our sins. And the reason we are feeling so empty in our lives is because we are experiencing this separation from God. That's the ultimate cause of our sense that something is wrong. It shows us that we are sinners needing to be forgiven.

But, there is good news. **[Slide]** 1 Corinthians 15:3-4 says: “**3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: 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.**” Most theologians say that this sounds like some sort of creedal statement that was recited by the early church. The heart of the gospel, that is of first importance, is that Jesus died for our sins, buried, and was resurrected. If Jesus didn't resurrect, his dying would not mean anything. His resurrection proved that Jesus dying for us was effective in forgiving our sins. **[Slide]** In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:17, Paul says, “**And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.**”

You can be forgiven today of your sins, and brought to God's presence, based not on what you have done, but on what God has done for you.

**[Slide] B. The resurrection means that we are also going to be resurrected as well.**

It's not that when we are resurrected, our bodies are turned into spirit. It's not that our bodies are gone, and we become a floating spirit. Jesus was physically resurrected. That's why he ate in the presence of the disciples. He wanted them to understand that he was physical. But, he was also super-natural. He could go through walls and be at one place one moment and zap to another place another moment.

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We will also be physically resurrected. [Slide] Paul says (in 1 Corinthians 15:53): “For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.” Some people think that our physical body is a prison that we need escape from to get to heaven where we will not have a material body. But, this passage says that the “perishable (body) must put on the imperishable (body).” The resurrection hope for Christians is that you’ll get more physical than you are now, not less.

What does mean? It means that you’re going to have a physical body that lasts; you’re not going to deteriorate. Jesus’ resurrected body was a super-physical body. It wasn’t less physical; it was more physical.

I don’t know exactly what that is going to mean, but perhaps it means instead of having five senses we’ll have 1,000. We’ll be more than we are now because our perishable body will put on the imperishable.

In the New Heavens and New Earth, everything will be heightened. How do you explain this? I’m not sure. How do you explain to a blind person what the color red is like? It’s difficult. No wonder the biblical writers had difficulty whenever they attempted to broach the subject.

What will it be like to be more physical? We’re going to experience things that we didn’t even know were possible with our current senses. Paul compares our bodies to a seed and the resurrected body to a tree. If our body is not an acorn, a seed, our resurrected body will be like an oak tree! Praise God!

God is also going to wipe away everything that is wrong with our world now because He’s not only going to renew you and me to live with the resurrected Christ in our resurrected bodies, He’s also going to renew creation so that the New Heavens and the New Earth reign fully together under His perfect administration.

No more hunger, no more tears, no more poverty, no more suffering, no more injustice and oppression. God’s rule will be total and comprehensive.

The material world matters to God. It’s why He created it! Martin Luther was asked what he’d do today if he knew that Christ was going to return tomorrow. He said, “I’d plant a tree.” He had his theology right. Why? In the Kingdom, things will grow

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better and more beautiful than they are now. God is going to remove the curse upon creation and the things that are beautiful now will become stunning when sin and curse is removed from this world. The physical world is important to Christ.

And the New Heavens and the New Earth will be a place where people of all races and background come together as one.

There is amazing love, amazing power, amazing glory, amazing joy, amazing fun. But, that's the future. That's our destiny. That's where we are going.

**[Slide] C. The resurrection gives us power for the present**

Let's put what we know about our past and future together and see the impact they have for the present: Because resurrection of Jesus means that it's actually true that Jesus died for our sins, it means that we will also be resurrected with Jesus. So, our salvation is not based on our works, but based on what Jesus has done for us.

If our fate is going to be decided by our works, how good we are, then we'll never know where we are going to end up. We'll never have the assurance.

But, if it is based on the work that Jesus has done to forgive us of our sins, we can be sure.

That was the way it was for the early Christians.

Because they saw Christ resurrected from the dead, many of these early Christians were willing to be persecuted and killed to be a witness to what they saw. You have to remember, they didn't die for a philosophy. They didn't die for a religion. They died for what they saw and experienced. They were certain that Jesus rose from the dead, and so, they were certain that their future was also sealed in resurrection.

The certainty of our future changes our present!

Let me give you an example.

Let's say two women work in the same menial job, same 80 hour work week, same bad supervisor, same bad working condition. But, one is told she is going to make \$10,000 at the end of the year; and the other is told she is going to make \$100 million at the end of the year. How do you think they will approach their jobs? Very differently.

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One is going to drag herself to work every day. Complain. It's miserable. But, the other is going to skip and joyfully do her job.

What we think about the future has a tremendous impact on how we approach the present. It can be radically different.

I read a book by Rodney Stark, a historian and sociologist, called *The Rise of Christianity*. It tries to explain how Christianity became so influential so quickly. In the book, Stark says that Christianity was different in three different ways from other Pagan religions and worldviews:

(1) Christians were amazingly charitable. They cared for orphans, poor, prisoners, and in times of famine, war or disease, they sacrificed themselves to help. In a time when plagues would run through a town or a section of the city and kill hundreds and thousands, Christians weren't like their Pagan neighbors who fled to save their own lives. Christians stayed and gave up their lives to love and serve those who were dying and needed care.

(2) Christians were forgiving people. When they were arrested and taken to be martyred, they didn't respond to the injustice with anger and retribution by terrorist acts. They died praying that God would forgive their enemies while offering forgiveness to their murderers.

(3) Christians were exceptionally inclusive. The Roman Empire conquered its enemies and for the first time created peace between all these various cultures and nations. The *Pax Romana* was established so that one could safely travel to other cities within the Empire. This created multi-ethnic tension as various cultures with competing worldviews now lived side by side as never before. Christianity was the first institution in the history of the world that brought people together across the ethnic and socio-economic, and sexual barriers.

The question we need to ask is why? Why were they so much more compassionate to the sick, so forgiving to those that persecuted them, and so much more ethnically inclusive than anyone had ever seen?

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Were they just ahead of their time because they were smarter? Were they nicer by nature than others? No, they were different because their lives were dependent upon what they believed about their future. They processed their current circumstances through their future confidence.

You might hear this and think that it sounds attractive and even noble. But how could these Christians be so certain of their future? How could they be sure? Why were they so confident of what was to come? The answer is: because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The answer is found in His resurrection from the dead. That's the key to all of this.

So, the resurrection proved to them and us that we can start a new life based on a completely different assumption of our future, based on a complete assurance of what's going to happen to us. That we are going to be resurrected like Jesus Christ.

Because of this certainty, because of this hope that they had of the future, they were willing to be thrown to lions to be devoured by them. They did it while singing and praising God.

We need this resurrection power in our lives.

Do you want to know how to handle your life's difficulties? How do you handle a difficult illness? How do you handle a difficult economic time? How do you handle a difficult relational time? How do you handle your loneliness? How do you handle stress in your life?

Come and see the resurrected Jesus. It's going to change everything about you.

It's going to take away your fear of death. If you put your faith in Jesus, death is stingless. **[Slide]** Paul says (in 1 Corinthians 15:55-57): **“Where O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting? The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks to be God. He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”** This is Paul's way of saying that death can't really kill you; it's paid for by Jesus. He took the poison for us. Yeah, it will bite you, but it won't kill you because the poison is taken out by Jesus. You'll die, but you won't die! There will be a resurrection!

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It's going to change your approach to suffering in your life. Notice all throughout the Bible that suffering continues. Even death continues. It's just the poison that is taken out. But, we know that suffering is temporary. Jesus suffered but he resurrected. And any suffering we experience will make our joy in the resurrected body greater. It's just like that the women who is working in bad condition but promised \$100 million at the end of the year. Her attitude towards the suffering changed. Our attitude towards suffering in our lives will change. If everything you are focused on is about this life and comfort in this life, you are not going to be happy unless conditions in your life are conducive to happiness. But, the resurrection-based approach will make you impervious to circumstances. You will stand on the rock. Things may bite you, but you will not be poisoned!

Your priorities will change. You will prioritize eternal things over temporal things. Your priorities will not be making more money. Just making a lot of money. What are you going to do when you get to heaven? If God asks you what you did, you can say, you made a lot of money. If he says, how much, you can say \$100 million. God's going to say, that's great, we now have enough money for all of us to play monopoly! You are going to make it a priority to get as many people as possible to enter into the Kingdom of God.

Your approach to injustice against you will change as well. On the one hand, you are going to do everything possible even at the cost of your life to help others who are suffering from injustice, but if someone is unjust against you, you are able to forgive because your life goal is not about retribution. It is about showing people the same grace God has shown you.

Your approach to addictions and sins will change as well. This resurrection power is the foretaste of the power of the Kingdom of God, where there is freedom! We know there is power in Christ. The same power that resurrected Jesus is available to you against your addictions and unhealthy lifestyles. That's why Jesus prayed, thy kingdom come. The resurrection power is the power of the kingdom of God come down here. The kingdom of God has been ushered in already. The new has started already and we can

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taste the goodness and experience the bits and pieces of this ultimate power in our lives today. That's what happened when the Holy Spirit came down and gave us power. The power of the Kingdom of God came down to us.

The resurrection power is available today! The power of the Kingdom is available today! That's why there is healing. That's why there is freedom! That's why the nations are coming together in community!