

HOW TO GET THE CHICKEN

Romans 6:4

INTRODUCTION

As I prepared for this talk it occurred to me that there are some people who only show up in church twice a year. They come at Christmas and Easter. I suspect that those folks must think the pastor is like a one-note samba. Or maybe a two note samba. They hear the pastor speak on the same subjects and say much the same thing every time they hear him. How boring is that? Does this dude ever say anything different? What an easy job he has. Just wind up him with the same old speech and let him go. He's like that recording you hear at the airport, "The white zone is for loading and unloading of passengers only." It's the same thing over and over again.

As I thought about this I felt challenged to come up with something fresh on Easter Sunday. I've been doing this for decades, maybe I need to change it up. My experience in that attempt reminded me of a song called *Tribute*. It was a product of a group called Tenacious D that was a collaboration between Jack Black and Kyle Gass. The song tells a story. One night they were on a lonely country road when suddenly, to their dismay, they were confronted by a frightening demon. The demon threatened them. He told them they had to sing for him the greatest song in the world, and if they didn't, he would eat their souls. So, they claim, they sang the first thing that came into their heads. And it turned out to be the greatest song in the world! The demon was astonished and asked if they were angels. And they said no, they were just men who played rock. But the song, *Tribute*, was not itself the greatest song in the world. In fact, the greatest song didn't sound anything like it. Unfortunately, after that traumatic experience they couldn't remember the greatest song in the world that they had created. So all they could do was sing a tribute to it.

I tell you this because to prepare for this morning, though I was not threatened by a demon, I nevertheless created the greatest sermon in the world. Unfortunately, before I could save it, my computer crashed and today I can't remember it. Like the song from Tenacious D, it has been wiped from my memory. So I'm going to preach this sermon instead. But I do want it to have some variety, so today instead of the usual Easter subject, I'm going to speak about a biblical perspective on parenting. Just kidding. No, really, I'm going to talk about the doctrine of baptism. Still kidding. Actually it occurred to me that though I am certainly going to do the best I can possibly do, the event we celebrate this morning is so great, so monumental, it doesn't need me to preach the greatest sermon in the world. It just

needs me to tell you the truth of what happened, because it is so powerful, so dynamic, it is the greatest event ever in the world. It is no accident that this event divides history. After this event everything was different. It was literally a life-changing and world-changing event like nothing that has ever happened or ever will happen. The event I refer to, of course, is the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death, the event we commemorate on Easter.

EXPOSITION

JESUS CAME BACK TO LIFE AFTER DYING

Romans 6:4 says of believers in Jesus Christ, “we were buried with him through baptism into death (see, I told you baptism would come up), in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” Notice the phrase “in order that.” The endgame of all that was going on in this verse is that we might have a new life. Baptism is a symbol of identification. So Paul says we were identified with Jesus’ death. We took it on as our payment for our guilt when we believed in Jesus. In so doing just as Jesus was given life after he died, a new kind of life, so we too will be given a whole new life. The result of his rising from the dead was that we should have a new life.

Of course, this pre-supposes that Jesus did, in fact, come back to life after he died. We know he died, but this coming back to life business is a bit hard to swallow. I mean, come on, who can believe that a man died and came back to life? We know people have experiences where they seem to die in the hospital but are revived. But no one dies, gets put in a grave for a couple of days and then comes back to life. People don’t come back to life after they die. It’s impossible. Uh, yeah, that was exactly the point. Jesus told people on multiple occasions that the sign that he was who he claimed to be, the Messiah, God with us in a human body, was that he would do something only God could do. He would defeat death.

Everyone would like God to do something dramatic that only he could do to prove that he actually exists. In the movie, *Bruce Almighty*, there’s a scene in which the main character, Bruce, encounters a person who claims he is actually God. Bruce challenges this supposed deity to prove it by telling him how many fingers he has hidden behind his back. God gets it right every time. The last time Bruce has all 5 fingers open, but God says, “7.” Bruce says, “Aha,” thinking this person is finally wrong, then he pulls his hand out to show that he’s wrong, only there are seven fingers on his hand. This freaks him out, but now he knows, this person is who he claimed to be. Jesus said this is how we will know that he was God among us. He

would die, and come back to life, doing the impossible, because with God, all things are possible.

People can do some astounding things. There was a man named Kim Peek who died in 2009. He was the inspiration for the movie *Rain Man*. He could read two pages of a book simultaneously, and he instantly memorized what he read. Before he died he had memorized 12,000 books! No one mistook him for God.

Remarkable, no doubt. But not divine. If you want to prove you are God you have to do something that only God can do, because otherwise no one is going to believe a normal looking human being is actually the creator of all. If Jesus weren't God then he was not able to give us this new life Paul mentioned.

I once was at a grocery store where the produce guy had unwisely used his time to create a beautiful pyramid of oranges. They were amazingly neatly stacked. But then I saw this woman come along and decide that an orange near the bottom was the one she had to have. She pulled it out, and the entire pyramid began collapsing around her. She was totally embarrassed as oranges began hitting the floor and rolling all over the place. Christianity hinges on Jesus' resurrection. It is like that orange. Pull it out and the entire Christian faith falls apart. It certainly cannot give new life to anyone. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:17 "if Christ were not raised from the dead then your faith is futile." It's useless. But who can believe this story of a man coming back to life?

People try to explain away the resurrection by saying one of two things. The most common is that this whole story is a legend that only was built up hundreds of years after Jesus lived. Or they say it was the result of early Christians wanting so bad for it to be true somebody thought they saw Jesus, claimed they did, in fact, see him, and the story spread, believed by gullible first century people who were quick to buy such tales. It was sort of like those people who claim they saw Elvis at a gas station.

Forget the legend idea. That theory is a joke. I'm amazed that even today supposedly intelligent people spout that one. It simply is not possible. You can't be honest and even moderately intelligent and informed and maintain that idea. Legends like that require hundreds of years to grow. They can't start quickly because witnesses to the actual events will shoot the legend down in a hurry. So the problem with this is that this little verse we are looking at today was part of a letter written by Paul to a group of Christians in Rome. Paul is a problem to begin with, because after the death of Christ, he was the farthest thing from those supposed "desperate to see Jesus" Christians. He hated Jesus, and he hated

Christians. He made it his life's work to rid the world of any hint of a Jesus movement. And then the Jesus he hated, risen from his grave, confronted Paul. Suddenly Paul had a whole new life work, telling people about Jesus, the God-Man who rose from the dead, and then personally confronted Paul. The problem here is that scholars universally agree that this letter was written some time in the mid 50's AD. It could have been as early as 51 or as late as 58, but most likely around 56 AD. Just over 30 years after Jesus' life, the resurrection of Jesus was already an established claim. Forget legend. Not possible.

Well the story spread because those gullible first century people believed in wild, supernatural fairy tales like the resurrection. Right. It's amazing how we assume that people from societies that produced Aristotle, Plato, Euripedes, Euclid and many other brilliant men were gullible rubes. Scholars today know that if anything people of that day thought the idea of a man rising from the dead was more preposterous even than we do today. If you just mentioned the idea, they would immediately write you off as a nut case or an idiot. That actually happened to Paul in Athens.

The problem for us is that ancient Jews had reverence for God that was way beyond anything we know today. One of their most precious fundamental tenets was that one must only worship the one, true God. To worship anyone or anything other than that God was abhorrent, an unimaginable offense. So how was it that within weeks of the execution of Jesus, not just a few, but thousands of devout Jewish people, the majority of them people who had previously rejected Jesus, were worshiping him as the Lord of all? How was that possible? It happened because they knew Jesus conquered death.

The biggest problem for most people who don't believe Jesus rose from the dead is they haven't taken time to look at the facts. The evidence heavily indicates he did the impossible and beat death. The Guinness Book of World Records says the most successful trial lawyer in history is Sir Lionel Luckhoo of England, who got 245 acquittals in murder trials. He didn't believe in Jesus, but at the age of 64 he was challenged to examine the facts of Jesus' life. He decided to use his legal training and put the resurrection to rigorous analysis. It proved life changing. He concluded, "I say unequivocally that the evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ is so overwhelming that it compels acceptance by proof which leaves absolutely no room for doubt."

J. Warner Wallace is a homicide detective in LA County. He was an outspoken atheist who relentlessly mocked and belittled Christians. When he was 35 years

old, he was challenged to use his investigative skills to examine the claims of Jesus. He figured it would be a chance to prove the stupidity of Christians. He took on the resurrection as a cold case. He ended up convinced of the truth of the biblical account of Jesus' resurrection. He wrote a book entitled *Cold Case Christianity*, presenting the case for Jesus. He concluded it by saying that he hoped skeptics who read his book might put down their presuppositions long enough to see the strength of the case for the reliability of the gospel writers.

A few years ago, Oxford University philosophy professor Richard Swineburne gave a presentation before a gathering of high-profile philosophy professors. In it he applied Bayes Theorem, a theory of probability, to the resurrection of Christ. British mathematician Harold Jeffries said the Bayes Theorem is to probability as the Pythagorean Theorem is to geometry. Using this widely used and trusted theorem he showed that the probability that Jesus did in fact rise from the dead in history was 97%! Overwhelming evidence indeed.

JESUS CAN GIVE US NEW LIFE

In his book, *Blue Like Jazz*, Donald Miller recalls taking a date to see *Romeo and Juliet*. His date and all the girls were enraptured by the tragic love story. He wasn't buying it. At one point after the play a girl said, "I wish I could be in love like Romeo and Juliet." He said under his breath, "They're dead." But the girls, including his date, heard it, and instantly she wanted nothing to do with him. She said she didn't think she could like him. He said, "Can we kiss? I hear that helps a girl fall in love." She said, "You're evil. You're the Antichrist." He says later, he "thought about poor old Romeo, begging for love, running off with his woman, and then accidentally dying. Some dates go terrible, it's a fact." But he thought about the key line in the play when Romeo said, "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptiz'd; Henceforth I never will be Romeo." Miller wrote, "He believed hooking up with Juliet would make him new, change his name, have him baptized and shiny. Everybody wants to be fancy and new." That's a crucial statement. Everyone wishes they could be new, different. They wish they could have a new start. This verse claims that we can have a new life because of the resurrection of Jesus. How will this new life be different? What will it be like? I will briefly mention five ways this life is new.

1. We can know God

The idea of God has been around a long time. It persists because it is actually pretty obvious. Years ago, Laurie and I were visiting friends up in Oregon. The husband was the football coach at Oregon State at the time. We went to a game. At halftime we were up in our friend's box as the Oregon State band performed on the

field. At one point I could see that the members of the band just happened to be standing in such a way that they spelled out the letters, “OSU.” I turned to Laurie and said, “Look at that. That’s amazing. The way the band members are standing, it looks like the letters, OSU! What a coincidence!”

No I didn’t actually say that. You’d have to be dumber than a box of rocks to believe that was an accident. It was blatantly obvious that there was a plan, a design for them to stand in such a way as to send intelligible information. We know that just from looking at three letters on a football field.

Let’s think about our DNA for a moment. Have you ever read *The Brothers Karamozov* by Dostoevsky? I have. Man, was that a chore. It’s over 1,000 pages long. Here’s the thing about your DNA. It contains enough information in organized order to fill up 200 books, each the size of Dostoevsky’s novel. Are you going to tell me that’s an accident? That book has over 364,000 words in it. The average English word is 4.5 letters long, so that’s 1, 638,000 letters. Your DNA contains information of that size times 200. That comes out to over 327 million letters. If we see three on a field, we know it’s by design. I think it would be obvious that 327 million absolutely *has* to be planned by someone.

Yeah, but who? It makes sense to know there is a designer out there, a creator who is behind all of this. But is this a being, a person? If so, what is that being like? The sad fact is, we can’t know... unless...he showed himself. Then we could know about him. The resurrection of Jesus means we don’t have to guess, we don’t have to wonder. We can know. We know who God is, because he has shown himself. And amazingly, we can know he loves us unconditionally. We can know he forgives the guilt that all of us carry around in us. We can know that he wants to be with us, and to actually work in our lives. We can live in his presence, and walk with him every single day. We are never alone because he is with us. This is a whole new way of living. It is living forgiven, loved, comforted and guided by God every single day.

2. We can have a new heart

The Old Testament prophet Ezekiel had relayed a message from God in which he said some day he would come and set up a new relationship with people. Jesus came to set up that new relationship, that new covenant. As part of that new covenant God said, “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you.” He said he would, “move you to follow my decrees.”

We are used to systems that say, “Here are a bunch of rules. Obey them or you lose.” That’s how our laws work. That’s how classes are run in schools. That’s how the rules of sports work. That’s how religions work. But God promised he would do a whole new thing. In this thing, established by the resurrection of Jesus, it would be a completely different system. You’re already loved and accepted, so you’re not going to lose. There’s no more threat of punishment. Instead, God said he would make it so we actually *want* to do what he says we should do. We would now live for whole new reasons.

Recently my wife, Laurie, and I, cared for our two little granddaughters. Three-year-old Ella wanted me to go lie down and pretend to be asleep (sounds like a great plan when you’re taking care of kids that age). She left the room and I had a lot to do so I got up and left the room. Ella caught sight of me and said, “Yapaw, why are you out of bed? We talked about this! Now you’re going to have to have a time out!” I’m being scolded and given a consequence by a three-year old! That’s the system, you have to obey or face the consequence. That’s how most of our lives are lived. Imagine how freeing it would be to live a life in which you are driven not by an external threat, but by the compulsion of your own heart.

Do you remember PE class? You had to do calisthenics and run laps and make some kind of effort to be in shape. It was the old system. Here are the rules. Obey them or you’ll get a bad grade, or even get in trouble. Then I watched my son, who did what was required in those classes (but no more), decide his sophomore year in college that he wanted to try to play football again. He wanted to walk on to that Division 1 team at his college. He worked insanely hard. The kid who avoided 8 AM classes like they carried Ebola, was going to practices at 6 in the morning. He ran and lifted weights like his life depended on it. He practiced and drilled and studied to learn the defense he would be playing in and his assignments as a free safety. He did it willingly and with enthusiasm. He did it joyfully, because it came from inside him. That’s how God said we can live in this new life.

3. We’ll have a new purpose

As part of that, God gives us a mission. 1 Peter 2:9 says that the mission is to be a holy people, a royal priesthood, who are alive to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” We live to honor the God who loves us. This is a mission that impacts every single thing we do. Why do I get up in the morning? To honor God. Why do I exercise? So I can better honor God. Why do I work hard at my job and do the best I can? So I can honor God. Why do I wash the dishes after dinner? Because I want to serve my wife, for that is a way I

can honor God. Every single thing we do becomes an opportunity to carry out our mission. Life becomes compelling, passionate and every single thing we do is full of purpose.

4. We can have eternal life

Here is the huge news. Because Jesus rose from the dead, we do not have to fear death any more. Do you remember the famous speech by Hamlet in Shakespeare's play where he said, "To be, or not to be"? He had found out that his beloved father had been murdered by his now new stepfather. He was overcome with grief and anger. He wanted revenge, but was so wrought with emotion he was thinking of suicide. To be or not to be. To live, or to kill myself. As he thought of suicide he said, "To die, to sleep; perchance to dream; ay, there's the rub. For in that sleep of death, what dreams may come when we have shuffled off this mortal coil, must give us pause... But that dread of something after death, the undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns, puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those ills we have, than fly to others we know not of."

Yes, he says, life is painful and hard. But the threat of death is worse and makes cowards of us all. Actor, director and producer Woody Allen says death is "absolutely stupefying in its terror and renders anyone's accomplishments meaningless." He says the struggle against it is the fundamental issue in life.

Death is horrifying. It is awful. My dad was a wonderful man. He was truly good, and he was an awesome father. He died almost 22 years ago. It was so hard, so painful when he died. We all went through a lot of grief. But recently I recalled a time, years after he died, when I came across some reminders of him. As I looked at them, I sat down and began crying. I soon found myself sobbing. How final, how cruel death is. And it stalks us every day of our lives. Laurie and I went through every parent's nightmare when our first son, Joel, died while still a baby. That was 35 years ago. I don't feel the pain of that now. But every now and then if I stop and recall it, the horror of it comes back. It is excruciating.

Because of the resurrection though, the pain and loss is not all I have. I have hope. I will see my son again. I will see my dad again. And when my time comes to face that final day, I don't need to be afraid, for I know that as Jesus lives again, so shall I. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me shall live even though he dies."

5. We can have peace

What every one of us wants more than anything else is peace. And we all lack it. One of my favorite old movies is *Field of Dreams*. There is a classic line in the movie during the climactic final scene. In it, Terence Mann, played by James Earl Jones, tells the main character, Ray, that people will come to his baseball field in the middle of Iowa cornfields and pay to do so because, “it’s money they have, but peace they lack.” That is the problem. Everyone is searching for peace.

Author and pastor Bryan Wilkerson tells the story of the time he took his family to a pizza joint where they had screens showing cartoons on the walls. The entire time they were there his four-year-old son was glued to Roadrunner cartoons. Finally, as they were getting near the end of the meal his son turned to Bryan and said, “Dad, no matter what he does, he’s never going to get the chicken.” He’s right, and we are like Wile E. Coyote. We try everything we can think of, coming up with the most fantastic schemes, in search of peace, and nothing works.

But Jesus said in John 14:27, “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.” He said we can have peace in him that is far beyond anything the world knows. We don’t have to be afraid.

We have peace because we know God loves us and nothing can ever separate us from his love. We have peace because we know he is with us every moment of every day. We have peace because we do not have to earn anything with God and we have nothing to prove. We have peace with ourselves because our worth comes from his love for us, not anything we do. We have peace because we know that as he rose from the dead, some day we will too; and will live with him in his kingdom that’s the place we’ve always longed for.

CONCLUSION

If you want this new life that the resurrection makes possible but have never had it, you can begin it today. John 1:12 says that whoever believes in Jesus has the right to become a child of God. You can put your faith in Jesus today, ask him to give you a new heart for him, and begin that new life, an eternal life today. Today can be the first day of your new life.

If you already believe in Jesus, rejoice, give thanks to God for the new life he has given you. Keep living this new life. Walk with God every day. Rest and rejoice in his love. Live in his peace. Follow the heart he has given you to obey him, and pursue the mission of honoring him every moment in everything you do.