

April 1, 2018  
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LIGHT THAT LAMP  
Ephesians 1:18-20

Laurie and I flew up to Sacramento Thursday then came home yesterday so that we could attend the wedding of a niece there. The good news was this trip involved no encounters with bats, unlike the last trip to a niece's wedding. For quite a few years now every time we have flown we have been given the TSA precheck. I love that. It enables us to skip some of the worst of the TSA torture. I've kind of taken it for granted. It has happened so consistently that I have sort of assumed it's kind of our right. We will just always have that status. I remarked on how nice it is that we get that on our way up because it is so much easier than going through the usual TSA ordeal. I should not have said anything. When we got our boarding passes for our flight home Laurie got the coveted precheck, but I did not. I had to wonder why. What did I do wrong? Because it has been so long since I had to go through the usual arduous routine I was out of practice. It took me several tries to get through. Yeah, I was that guy. First I had my wallet in my pocket. I always do that in the precheck system and it's not a problem. Ah but it is a problem for the less privileged. I couldn't understand why. There's nothing in it, unfortunately. Can't their machine tell that? I went back through sans wallet and that was fine. I was then accosted by a female agent who accusingly informed me that I had left my iPad in my backpack. Is this a problem? I always do that in precheck and it's fine. The agent looked at me like I was either dumber than a rock or, more likely, a cunning evil mastermind masquerading as a dunce. Finally they grudgingly let me go, but they sort of let me know they had their eye on me.

I asked one of the airline people why Laurie would get privileged status but I wouldn't. She said it was just random. I'm not buying it. Once TSA pulled me out of a precheck line and said they had to test my hands for explosives residue. Another time they pulled me out of the line and frisked me. They insisted every time that these things are random. Well if they're so random why is it always me? These things never happen to Laurie. Just to me. Does that sound random to you? They're watching me. I've been profiled. Yeah, clearly they suspect me of being a member of one of those light skinned blue eyed old man terrorist cells so common to Al Qaeda.

I do accept the claim that they are random, because my only other alternative is paranoia and donning an aluminum foil hat. But my brain finds that random explanation unsatisfying. Surely I must have messed up somehow. There has to be

a reason why these things seem to happen to me. But the truth is, some things are just random. Randomness happens. But the big question is this: is all of life random? There are times when it certainly does seem that is true, and there are many in our society who believe that is true. In fact, that is quickly becoming the doctrine of our culture. My mind finds that deeply unsatisfying, but that doesn't mean it's not true. I don't know that I will ever be able to prove the truth about TSA and it's "random" harassment of me, but is there a way to find out about whether life is purely random? It turns out there is a way and it has to do with what happened on Easter Sunday.

Easter definitely can be confusing. Comedian Billy Crystal said, "2000 years ago Jesus was crucified. Three days later he walks out of a cave. And now they celebrate with chocolate bunnies, marshmallow peeps and beautifully decorated eggs. I guess these were things Jesus loved as a child." The bunnies and eggs confuse things, but if we can look past that we find that this day is the most significant, life-changing and history changing event that has ever occurred. Let's think about the significance of Easter and its power in our lives.

#### THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS INVOLVES ENORMOUS POWER

In this letter we see Paul telling us that he prayed that his readers, and eventually we, could know and understand the incomparably great power, the capability required to raise Jesus Christ from the dead. That is a profound and enormous power. It is a capability that we dream of, but that we do not possess. We all have heard the many stories of people whose hearts have stopped, and for a period of time they were essentially dead, but who have been resuscitated and go on living. But no one can do that for someone who has been dead for a couple of days. The claim is that Jesus died late Friday afternoon, and was brought back to life early on Sunday morning. This was not some terrific resuscitation accomplished by medical science, which, of course, didn't exist back then. It was a capability that we dream of, but which no one has. How do you make a dead person live? The simple answer is you can't. It is not possible.

Right, that's the problem. It's not possible. So how are we supposed to believe that such a thing actually happened? It sure sounds like an urban legend. It may seem outrageous and mythical to consider someone being dead and then coming back to life, but if you study the incident you will discover that there is impressive evidence that it actually happened. Simon Greenleaf, law professor at Harvard, said, "A person who rejects Christ may choose to say 'I do not accept it' he may not choose to say there is not enough evidence...According to the laws of legal

evidence used in the courts of law, there is more evidence for the historical fact of the resurrection of Jesus Christ than for...any other event in history.”

Norman Perrin was a skeptical scholar at the University of Chicago, one who resisted believing in the resurrection. Yet he at one point reluctantly admitted about the resurrection appearances of Jesus, “The more we study the tradition with regard to the appearances, the firmer the rock begins to appear upon which they are based.” He didn’t like it, but it had to admit that it was true.

But a man rising from the dead is impossible. Right. And that is precisely the point. Jesus had to have some way of verifying that he was who he claimed, God incarnate living among us. The only way he could do that was to do something that was impossible, something humans cannot do. He had to do something that no one can do, and that as a result is a once in history event. If there were a number of resurrections from the dead throughout history it would make it easier for us to believe it happened, but it would also mean that Jesus was not the unique divine person he claimed to be.

If the resurrection of Jesus did not occur, we would not be here today. There never would have been a movement known as Christianity. The church would never have existed, for there would have been no reason for it to exist. The leader of the movement was dead and had been shown to be a very human shyster, or a pathetic dude who believed his own claims to divinity, only to be violently disabused of those notions when he was executed. How did hundreds, thousands, of first century Jews begin worshiping a man, something they considered abhorrent? How did frightened, defeated common folk, suddenly begin proclaiming that a man who had died was, in fact, God in human form and that he was still alive? There is no cogent explanation for the existence of the Christian movement apart from the resurrection. No Jesus rising from the dead, no church. The Jesus movement was done, once and for all.

Dr. Joshua Swamidass, a professor at Washington University Medical School, wrote an article in Scientific American last year about the validity of the resurrection. In it he wrote, “Without the physical resurrection, 2000 years of history are left begging for explanation, like a movie missing a key scene. No other event in all recorded history has reached so far across national, ethnic, religious, linguistic, cultural, political and geographic borders. The message spread with unreasonable success across the world. During just the first few centuries, it spread without political or military power, prevailing against the ruthless efforts of dedicated, organized and violent opposition. How did a small band of

disempowered Jews in an occupied and insignificant territory of Ancient Rome accomplish this unequaled act?"

The existence of the letter we call Ephesians is itself powerful evidence of the reality of the resurrection. It was written by Paul. He was a contemporary of Jesus, and he hated him. He hated the followers of Jesus. He was incensed, enraged by those people claiming that Jesus had risen from the dead. And then he saw that risen Jesus, and he did the most dramatic 180 in human history. He became one of the most dynamic Jesus believers the world has ever seen. There is no explanation for that apart from the reality of the resurrection.

#### THAT POWER IS TOWARD US

One statement in these verses that is stunning is that this enormously great power, the power to overcome death, is "for us who believe." Literally it is toward us. In other words, this astounding power is capable of working in our lives. But what is it capable of doing?

Romans 6:3 says when we put our faith in Christ and trust in what he did for us when he died so long ago we were baptized into his death. Then verse 4 says, "We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life." Jesus died, but then came back to life, and that life will never end. It was a new kind of life. In the same way, then, when we trust in Jesus what we used to be came to an end. That way of living died, and now we are raised to live a new way. The power of the resurrection is capable of doing something new in us. But in what ways is this new life different? How does that power change us into something new?

#### **It gives us meaning.**

The doctrine of our culture right now is that all that exists is the product of randomness and chance. Our existence is pure accident. Matter and physics are all that exist, so we live for few years and then we die. Our matter is recycled back into the system and that is the end of us. This necessarily means that our lives have zero meaning. They truly are a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. An accident has no purpose, no point. It is merely a curious event with no deeper significance.

Thursday night we were at a rehearsal dinner at the home of Laurie's brother, Ted. The event took place in his back yard. At one point I had a cup full of water. Laurie and I were talking to the boyfriend of one of Ted's adult daughters. I made

one of those moves that I have no explanation for. As I was talking I was gesturing with my free hand and somehow banged it into the cup I was holding, knocking it over and causing all the water to splash down on my shoes and the patio. It must have looked like I had a sudden convulsion. Laurie had a quizzical, “what in the world are you doing” look on her face, and said “why did you do that?” That was an excellent question, one I had no answer for other than to say, “it was an accident.” Yes, that’s true, it surely was that, but what did it mean? It meant that my clumsiness could well be a danger to not only myself but to others around me. But what did it mean beyond that? What was the point of that event? Why did it happen? Obviously there was no cosmic meaning of that event. It happened because I’m a klutz, but for no other reason. It had no meaning. It was just an unfortunate event, end of story. Accidents have no meaning. And if we are accidents then we have no meaning either. There is no reason for our existence and no point to it either.

We might try to establish some sense of significance by creating or doing something lasting. But the unfortunate reality with that is we are painfully temporary and so is everything we do. I’ve told this before, but in my pitiful athletic endeavors I won the impressive total of one award. It wasn’t an award based on my great ability, which makes sense given that I didn’t have any. My senior year in high school my teammates voted me “Most Inspirational Player.” You hear a lot about MVP’s in sports. You don’t hear a lot about MIP’s. That’s because that’s usually Most Inspirational Players are gritty little guys who try hard but aren’t any good. It was a total surprise to me that I was given that award. Honestly, it felt good and I was kind of proud of it. At the school they have a perpetual plaque with the name of every winner of the MIP award for baseball engraved on it. I patted myself on the back that at least forever that plaque would be on display at East Bakersfield High School with the name Rick Myatt on it. Maybe some day I would visit, bring my wife and show her that plaque and prove that I made my mark on that school. I never did make that visit. But about 15 years after I graduated Laurie and I were in Bakersfield. I was with a friend who was at a trophy shop arranging for a trophy. I happened to glance in a corner where there were some discarded plaques and trophies. One of them was the plaque for Most Inspirational Players in baseball at East High. I was stunned. Someone had basically thrown it away. I went over and looked at it, and sure enough, for my year there was the name Rick Myall on it. Yeah, I really made my mark. They misspelled my name then years later threw away the plaque. I’m so proud.

Unfortunately, my pitiful little experience isn’t all that different than most, maybe all, of the big things we do in an effort to somehow feel that our lives mean

something. A recent survey discovered that more than half of the young people surveyed had as one of their most important goals to become famous, to someday be a celebrity. They want to mean something, to make their permanent mark.

There is this big need in our culture to “be somebody,” and being famous is the best way to do that. But let’s think about how fulfilling that actually is. I will ask you 3 questions. In 2008, a mere 10 years ago, who won the Super Bowl, who won the World Series, and who won the Academy award for Best Actress? I made a wild stab that the Patriots won the Super Bowl, since they win it about half the time. I was wrong. The New York Giants won the Super Bowl. The Philadelphia Phillies won the World Series, which I had zero recollection of. And Kate Winslet won best actress for her lead role in some movie called *The Reader*, which I’m pretty sure I never even heard of. Somehow those great triumphs of famous people get forgotten very quickly.

Philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer said, “we can regard our life as a uselessly disturbing episode in the blissful repose of nothingness.” In other words, we are useless and meaningless. Woody Allen said that death “is absolutely stupefying in its terror and renders anyone’s accomplishments meaningless.” The problem for us is that our souls scream out that life must have meaning, that there is a point to this. Ravi Zacharias said, “No matter how much we try to run away from this thirst for...the meaning of life; the intensity only gets stronger and stronger. We cannot escape it.” Harvard professor James Wood in an article in *New Yorker* told of a friend who is a convinced atheist philosopher who often wakes at night torn by angst over the idea that life is an accident. “How could there be no design, no metaphysical purpose? Can it be that every life—beginning with my own, my husband’s, my child’s, and spreading outward—is cosmically irrelevant?” She can’t live and be at peace with that idea.

The power of the resurrection is that it means God is real. There is a Creator, so our existence is not an accident. God had a reason for giving you and me life. There is a point to it all. It’s not a tale told by an idiot, and it signifies a lot. We may not understand it all, but we know there is a point to our lives. God has a purpose for us being alive.

Philippians 2:12-13 says, “Therefore my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.” To do what? Fulfill his purpose. He has a purpose. He has a reason for us being alive. Romans 8:28 says “We know that in

all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.” There it is again. God has a purpose for us.

Furthermore the resurrection means that our lives are not temporary, they will go on after death. God tells us that our deeds will go on in that realm after we die. That means that not only do our lives mean something, but that they have eternal significance. In his book, *Abba’s Child*, the late Brennan Manning wrote, “Everything great, small, important, unimportant, distant and near has its place, its meaning and its value...Nothing is wasted, nothing is missing. ***There is never a moment that does not carry eternal significance.***”

Ken Shigematsu, pastor and author of the book, *God In My Everything*, wrote, “If the resurrection actually happened, if God will one day renew the earth, then every prayer, every act of love and kindness, every minute teaching a special needs child to read or walk, or listening to a lonely elderly person, every work of art or music inspired by the love of God...will somehow find its way into the new creation that God will one day bring about. ***The smallest act of kindness will become infinite.***”

When you put together an Easter basket or gave money to help do that for those poor kids in City Heights, the world did not notice. It won’t change the world. But that act of kindness will become infinite and it will live forever. If you help feed a child in some poverty stricken third world country through World Vision or Compassion International, that won’t solve poverty forever, but that act of kindness will live on in eternity. Recently I managed to lose a kind of pricey pair of sunglasses that Laurie had given me as a gift a couple of years ago. For the life of me I couldn’t figure out what I did with them. They were just gone. She tried to help me figure it out, but she was patient and loving with me. She didn’t berate me. She didn’t say, “Rick, how could you be so careless?” She just loved me. And on my birthday she, perhaps foolishly, but generously, gave me another pair just like them. She could have rolled her eyes, told her friends about her clueless, hopeless husband, expressed disdain or frustration to me. But she did none of that. She just loved me. That act of love will live on forever, because of the resurrection.

This infuses every moment of our lives with meaning. When I was working on this sermon I went to get a haircut. When it came time to pay the lady who cut my hair I faced the question of a tip. I’ve said it before, tipping is annoying. You pay someone to do their job, then you pay them again. Does that make any sense? What a weird custom. I don’t tip the guys who change the oil in my car. Am I supposed to? I don’t think so. How about the teller at the bank who cashed my check for me. Am I supposed to tip her? I don’t think so. Why some and not

others? This is a conundrum that will not be solved in my lifetime I fear. However, it hit me that I could be kind to that woman by giving her a generous tip. And that was an opportunity. It was an opportunity to do something that will live forever and have significance forever. How cool is that? The great truth is that the power of the resurrection is that it fills every moment of our lives with meaning. Nothing we do is pointless. Nothing. It all has meaning that will last forever.

### **It gives hope.**

Of course the great promise of the resurrection is that it means God has acted to defeat death and make it possible for us to live eternally. It means this new life we have been raised to, which increasingly will be a life of love, joy, peace, kindness and goodness, will never end.

All of us have a terminal condition. It is called life. It doesn't end well. Way too quickly it comes to an end and we are hopeless to do anything about it. But the resurrection promises us that the end of this life need not be the end of life. It promises a life that not only goes on, but that is immeasurably better than this life. 1 Thessalonians 4:14-17 says, "For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of our Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever."

Peggy Noonan wrote, "Our ancestors believed in two worlds, and understood this to be the solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short one." Our culture tells us that this world is all there is. If that is true, then this world is your only chance at happiness. That being the case, if the world doesn't give you what you feel you need, if you do not get a generous share of this world's good things and its riches, then you will not merely be disappointed. You will be despairing, desperate, and more than a little angry at the unfairness of it all. And the really tragic part of it is that no matter how much you do get, even if it is an abundant heaping of this world's good stuff, it won't be enough. You will still feel more than disappointed.

The powerful news of the resurrection is that there is real world, physical proof that death has been defeated. This is not desperate grasping, wishful thinking, it is not based on someone's near death experience of a white light. It is Jesus



predicting that he would die and come back to death, then physically doing it. It is Jesus being physically alive so people could touch him, see his scars, watch him eat food. That is the only real, undeniable evidence that life after death is for real. It is the promise that we too will physically live even after we die, and that we will live without end.

Toby recently sent me a brief video of little Ella, our granddaughter. She is 2 years old, and in the video she picks up a pretend phone, answers it and says, “Hi Yapaw, it’s me.” Then she walks away continuing to talk to Grandpa on the phone. That little kid is so precious. I love her more than I can express. And sadly, though I hope I live long enough to have some input in her life and have her remember me, I am not going to be here for most of her life. Maybe I can beat the odds and live another 20 to 25 years, but she will just be launching into her adult life at that point. That is so terribly sad. It is almost unbearable. Except the power of the resurrection means that my leaving this life is not the end of life for me or for her. I will get to be with her for eternity.

Understanding that because of the resurrection we have the certain hope of eternal life changes everything. Theologian Richard Baxter suffered from poor health all of his life. He had an impressive list of debilitating ailments. For him life was a daily struggle. He made it a practice to meditate for a half hour every day on heaven, on the promise of eternal life in the kingdom of God, and he said it had a profound effect on him. So he wrote, “If you would have light and heat, why are you not more in the sunshine? For want of this recourse to heaven, your soul is as a lamp not lighted...Fetch one coal daily from this altar...keep close to this reviving fire, and see if your affections will not be warm.” Baxter could not change all the ailments that made life so hard for him, but he could change his attitude, his spirit, what he was able to bring to other people, by focusing on the truth that he had the certainty of eternal life.

### APPLICATION

The power of the resurrection is broader even than these two ideas. It means we can be different people, have courage and strength to be people full of grace, goodness, generosity, kindness, forgiveness, love and joy. But how do we do that?

### PUT YOUR FAITH IN JESUS’ DEATH AND RESURRECTION

If you have never made the decision to believe in Jesus, understand there are powerful reasons to do so. He proved his claims through historical events for which there is great evidence. And he can bring things to your life that you can

gain no other way. The meaning, the hope, the life and the joy that Jesus can give you can be found nowhere else. So put your faith in him today.

### COUNT ON WHAT JESUS HAS DONE FOR YOU

If you are a believer in Jesus, remember that your life is bursting with meaning and hope. Dana Tierney wrote an article in New York Times Magazine, about how her son surprised her and shook up her life some years ago. She and her husband are both atheists, but she was stunned by her son, Luke. When her husband John was embedded with troops in Iraq she was continually afraid. But 4 year old Luke was always calm. Once when watching on TV an interview with a soldier in Iraq Dana saw Luke fold his hands and pray. They had not taught him that. He said that's why he could be calm about his daddy. She asked when he began to believe in God he said, "I don't know. I've always known he exists." She went on to write that she feels she is missing out on something important. She says her religious friends "have an expansiveness of spirit. When they walk along a stream, they don't just see water falling over rocks; the sight fills them with ecstasy. They see a realm of hope beyond this world. I just see a babbling brook. I don't get the message."

Live in the reality of the resurrection. God is real. He is there. He loves us. He created us for a reason. We get the message. There is hope every moment of our lives, and every single thing we do has meaning. Life will not end with our death, but will go on for eternity. Live in that hope and meaning. As Baxter said light the lamp of your soul by continually keeping close to the reviving fire of the resurrection.