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# RAISED?

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DOUBTING THE RESURRECTION

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— BY —

JONATHAN K. DODSON

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& BRAD WATSON





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BY JONATHAN DODSON  
& BRAD WATSON



*Raised? Doubting the Resurrection*

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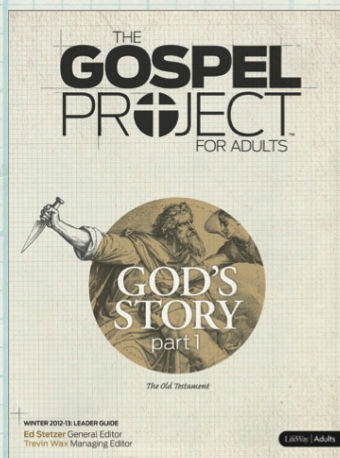
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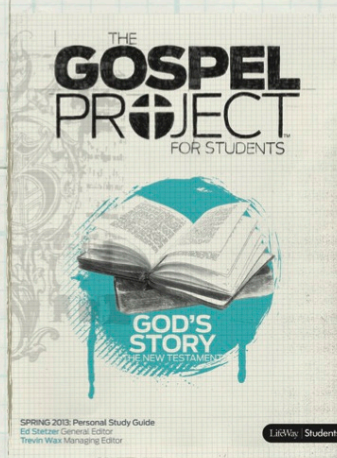
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This book is a collaborative work by Jonathan Dodson and Brad Watson, who partner together in leading [gospelcenterreddiscipleship.com](http://gospelcenterreddiscipleship.com). We wrote it out of our love for skeptics and respect for the questions they help us ask. We also write as believers who oscillate in real belief in the resurrected Christ. We hope it proves to be an insightful, stirring reflection on the resurrection. Jonathan worked primarily on chapters one and three and Brad contributed to chapters two and four.

## 1. Doubting the Resurrection?

*And when they saw him they worshiped him, but some doubted.*

*- Matthew 28:17*

One in five Americans don't believe in a deity. The "none" category in religious polls has doubled over the past ten years. Less than half of the population attends religious services on a regular basis.<sup>1</sup> As statistics rise on the decline of Christian faith in America, you may find yourself wondering if Christianity is really worth believing? After all, the Christian faith makes some audacious claims.

### **Audacious Claims of the Gospel**

Some of the most audacious claims are made right at the center of the Christian faith—in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Though some particulars may vary, the gospel is something all Christians agree on: "that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day" (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Now, there are some big assumptions made in this verse: that we sin; that Christ was strong enough to deal with sin, and that he was stronger than death—he was raised from the dead!

If this is all true, Jesus calls us to respond by faith in him to receive forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life (John 3:16; Romans 6:23). Here we have four big concepts—sin, faith, Christ, and eternal life. Followers of Christ have, at times, communicated these concepts terribly. As a result, there is a general misunderstanding, even among some Christians, as to what these terms mean. For instance, eternal life (or resurrection life) is often mistaken as an escape from life in order to get into a cloudy eternity. How

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<sup>1</sup> Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar, [American Religious Identity Survey](#) (Hartford: Trinity College, 2009).



boring! While we address this error throughout the book, it gets particular attention in chapter four. In chapter three, we examine the meaning of sin, faith, and Christ. These are misconstrued to mean bad behavior, wishful thinking, and great teacher. Way off target. All of these concepts lack deep appeal apart from a greater narrative to fit into. In chapter two, we trace the bigger story of Scripture to see if it resonates with human longing. In this chapter, we hone in on an audacious gospel claim—that Jesus was raised from the dead.

At first glance, the death of Jesus is easy enough to embrace. It is well documented and the Roman authorities crucified people regularly. The god-sized claim beneath his self-sacrifice is what ruffles feathers. The claim that his sacrifice was on behalf of *all humanity* troubles both our pride and our intellect. Jesus, represented all of us? What gives him the right? Who says we need a representative or sacrifice anyway? The gospel gets crazier. The bull's eye of the gospel is the death *and resurrection* of Jesus. We don't have to dive deep to surface doubt with the resurrection. Its surface value is, well, incredible. The notion that a first century Jewish man, crucified between two common thieves, was actually God and rose from the dead is unbelievable. To the modern mind, resurrection is utterly implausible. People don't beat death, especially after being in the grave three days. In light of recent horror trends, we might be more inclined to believe in a zombie emerging from the dead than a resurrected and fully restored person. Yet, at the center of historic Christian faith is the belief that a Jewish man named Jesus was "raised."

If you doubt the resurrection, I'm glad. Anything worth believing has to be worth questioning, but don't let your questions slip away unanswered. Don't reduce your doubts to a state of unsettled cynicism. Wrestle with your doubts. Find answers.<sup>2</sup> If you call yourself a believer and a skeptic, don't settle for pat proofs, emotional experiences, or duty-driven religion. Keep asking questions. Those who haven't questioned their faith can easily become doctrinaire, even detached from the everyday struggle of faith.

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<sup>2</sup> For an insightful resource on skepticism and the claims of Christianity see Timothy Keller's book, [The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism](#) (New York: Dutton, 2010).



Whether you are a skeptic, believer, or somewhere in between, press into your faith or push into your doubt. Question your faith and question your doubts. Determine good reasons for believing or not believing in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If he really did defeat death, it changes everything. Doubt well and you can walk away from skepticism, cynicism, or blind faith into perceptive belief, intellectual security, and deeper commitment. You can know that you have honestly *questioned the resurrection*.

## **Others Who Struggle to Believe**

You aren't the only one to struggle with belief in the resurrection. The story of the resurrection includes many doubters. The resurrection story is rooted in an historical account of events in first century Palestine (modern day Israel). The Gospels (written by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) report these events from four different vantage points, narrating the life, ministry, death, and alleged resurrection of Jesus. The Gospel authors tell us that Jesus predicted his death and resurrection years before it occurred (John 2:22). He knew what was coming and went along with it. He didn't run. One evening, Jesus met his disciples in a garden to pray. Suddenly, he was interrupted by clanging armor and flaming torches. Roman soldiers appeared to arrest him at the behest of the religious right (the Pharisees). The Pharisees charged Jesus with sedition, a charge most unsettling to the Roman Empire. As his disciples scattered, Jesus was left to face trial alone. He was quickly tried in the wee hours of Friday morning and crucified that afternoon. He was buried that night. On Sunday, grief stricken women went to visit Jesus' tomb. As devoted disciples, they were shocked to find his tomb uncovered. Other disciples joined them, entered the tomb, and found his body gone, with his grave clothes lying there. This is where doubt begins to creep in.

Some claim the body was stolen. Mary thought the same thing, until Jesus appeared to her. Other disciples disbelieved her resurrection report, even after Jesus appeared to them (Luke 24:36-43). They mistook him for a ghost, so Jesus took it upon himself to prove his physical existence. He ate a piece of fish before their very eyes and they all believed, except doubting Thomas. Thomas saw all of this and remained incredulous. He

heard the news, saw the man, and even watched Jesus perform an experiment proving he was real. Now, if God really is Jesus, and he's risen from the dead standing right in front of you, proves he's not a spirit, and you still doubt, how do you think Jesus should respond? You'd think Jesus would smack him down for doubt, rebuke Thomas on the spot, and call him to fall in line with his now believing friends. But he didn't. Instead, Jesus entertains his doubts. He invites Thomas to press his hands to his tender crucifixion wounds, charging him: "Do not disbelieve, but believe" (John 20:27).

If you doubt the resurrection, you're in good company. To the solidly skeptical and those struggling with doubt, Jesus remains ready to receive our questions. Jesus entertains doubts. He also implores belief. (Wouldn't you if you died and rose from the dead, appearing to your disbelieving family and friends?) And to those who do not see the resurrected Christ, and still believe, Jesus confers a particular blessing (John 20:29). Though a blessing from God sounds nice, it can still be hard to get past the implausibility of someone rising from the dead. Many believe in the historical Jesus, but fewer believe in the resurrected Jesus.

*The resurrection is like a river that parts a road. People are on the road approaching the river. Arriving at the river of the resurrection, you look across it to where the road continues, and see quite a few cars are parked there. In your doubt, you can't imagine how people got to the other side. How did they get across the river? How can rational people come to the belief that Jesus died and rose from the dead?<sup>3</sup>*

## **The Global Perspective**

Truth be told, the parking lot on the other side of the resurrection is overflowing. Resurrection-believing Christians are all over the world. Today there are approximately 2.2 billion Christians in the world, almost a billion more Christians than Muslims (who adhere to the second largest world religion, Islam). Christians around the world claim a personal encounter with Christ and a relationship with a resurrected Jesus. Many of

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<sup>3</sup> I have adapted this metaphor from N.T. Wright, [\*Following Jesus\*](#) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 110.

them are so devout they have suffered for their belief in the resurrected Christ. These believers are from a broad array of cultures and ethnic backgrounds. What are we to conclude from this?

Because Christianity is the world's largest (and incredibly diverse) religion, should you jump ship on your unbelief or switch religions? The sheer number of believing, praying, suffering Christians does not make the resurrection true, but it should make it *possible*. It is possible that Islam is also true; however, Muslims do not put hope in a resurrected messiah. Allah is not a God who suffers for humanity and conquers death. In Jesus, however, we find God crucified and raised to life. According to the Bible, the resurrection is also a preview of things to come (1 Corinthians 15). Resurrection isn't restricted to Jesus. All who have faith in him will eventually gain a resurrected body to enjoy a "resurrected" world. This certainly is hopeful. If billions of people and thousands of cultures have found hope in the resurrection, then perhaps there is something to it? How did all those ethnic groups come to believe a claim as implausible as the resurrection of Jesus?

The majority of the Christian population has shifted away from the West to the South and the East.<sup>4</sup> The current statistical-geographical center of global Christianity is, quite literally, Timbuktu, Mali.<sup>5</sup> That's Africa. The largest Christian nation is China. Now, the interesting thing about the current center of global Christianity is that it is in cultures that affirm the supernatural. In fact, the global south encounters inexplicable, supernatural events on a regular basis. Not so in the West, we have ruled out the supernatural. We rarely see such extraordinary things. We begin with the assumption that the supernatural is not possible. Is this position critical or biased? To be sure, some Americans are willing to believe in the supernatural the teachings of Buddha, Vishnu, and Eckhart Tolle, but are we willing to believe in Jesus, risen from the dead? If we are to consider the plausibility of the resurrection, we must begin with its *possibility*.

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<sup>4</sup> Philip Jenkins, [The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity](#) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Todd Johnson, [International Bulletin of Missionary Research](#), 2010.



Critical of our default cultural position, this is the only intellectually honest place to begin. Is it true, as the Apostle Paul summarized: “that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)? Let’s consider this central tenant of a historic world faith. We will begin by asking other skeptics who were alive at the time of Jesus’ alleged resurrection. Did they find the resurrection plausible? How did some of them get across the river of doubt?

## **The Greeks**

We will look at two major groups of people who were around during the time of Jesus—the Greeks and the Jews.<sup>6</sup> In general, the Greeks were very open to the supernatural. Although Greek philosophy evolved over time from Homeric belief in gods like Zeus, to the Platonic belief in philosophy like The Forms, the Greeks still believed there were forces greater than nature at work in the world. However, views of what happened at death varied. Some Greeks, like Homer, believed that man becomes a disembodied, witless spirit destined to roam Hades. You may remember the Underworld from High School mythology, a gloomy place of post-mortem existence. For Homerians, death was not a welcome prospect. Other Greeks anticipated escape from the world at the point of death. Take the Epicureans, who believed the soul was composed of particles that disintegrated upon death. For them, there was no existence after death at all. For Epicureans, death was welcomed but not with the hope of life. Those who followed Plato believed that the soul was immaterial and good. Upon death the soul was liberated from the body into a Hades altogether different. For followers of Plato, Hades was not a place of gloom but a place of delight, of extended philosophical discussion. In platonic thought, death was welcomed with the hope of escaping the body.

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<sup>6</sup> I have been helped immensely by N.T. Wright’s work on first century conceptions of resurrection, which can be found in greater detail in his book, [\*Resurrection and the Son of God\*](#).

<b>GREEKS &amp; THE AFTERLIFE CHART</b>
Homerians, death was not a welcome prospect.
Epicureans, death was welcomed but not with the hope of life.
Platonic thought, death was welcomed with the hope of escaping the body.

So, for the Greeks the notion of an embodied life after death, of a resurrection, was neither possible nor desirable. Very often they saw the world and the body as something that it constantly falling apart. When a person died, they were liberated from their decaying body. The body was a cage. The band Arcade Fire captures this sentiment: “My body is a cage that keeps me from dancing with the one I love / But my mind holds the key.”<sup>7</sup> For the Greeks, salvation was an escape from the body. Eastern religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism follow a similar line of thinking. Death is escape from the body. Here’s the point—for the Greeks there was no afterlife, no hope of an embodied existence after death. So, for them, the resurrection was simply implausible.

Now, let’s consider the Greek views on death next to Christian claim of the resurrection. If you came to the Greeks and said, Jesus was raised from the dead. They would probably scratch their head and say, “Why would he want to do that?” Why would he want to return to his cage, to resume existence in this inferior, decaying world? Why not embrace the liberating power of death? To die is to be set free. Why would anyone want to be resurrected? For the Greeks, resurrection was implausible. N.T. Wright helpfully summarizes: “The ancient world was thus divided into those who said that the resurrection couldn’t happen, though they might have wanted it to, and those who said they didn’t want it to happen, knowing that it couldn’t happen anyway.”<sup>8</sup> Resurrection wasn’t a category for the Greeks nor was it desirable. Now, what about the other big group of people who were alive during the alleged resurrection of Jesus?

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<sup>7</sup> Arcade Fire, “[My Body is a Cage](#)” *Neon Bible*.

<sup>8</sup> N.T. Wright, [The Resurrection and the Son of God](#) (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003 ), 82.

## **The Jews**

Unlike the Greeks, the Jews believed in a great resurrection at the end of history, when everyone would be reunited with their bodies and stand before God for judgment and, for some, salvation (Daniel 7; Ezekiel 37). The people of God would be vindicated based on his covenant relationship with them and the rest would be judged. At this point in the future, all things would be renewed—bodies, cities, all creation (Isaiah 60). The end of history brought about a new creation. So, if you came to a Jew in the middle of history and told them that Jesus was their messiah raised from the dead, they would be confused. Like the Greeks, they too would scratch their heads and say: “Are you crazy? Look around, it’s not the end of history; there is no new creation. I don’t have a new body, and we still suffer; the world is still broken, and Romans still oppress us. All things are not new.” For Jews, it was unthinkable that resurrection could occur in the middle of history, apart from worldwide renewal. Even more unthinkable was the idea that an individual would be resurrected and not all humanity at once. So for the Jews and the Greeks of Paul’s day, the resurrection was implausible. They both would scratch their heads and wonder how in the world anyone could get across the river. Here’s the deal—if you find the resurrection implausible, you’re in good company with centuries of Greek and Jewish thought! If this is true, then what really happened on Easter morning?

## **What Really Happened Easter Morning?**

Greeks and Jews possessed age-old beliefs that have been tested much more than modern empiricism or postmodern skepticism. Yet, Jews and Greeks alike suddenly changed their beliefs to embrace the resurrection. Why? How are we to account for a sudden, dramatic shift in their beliefs around the lifetime and person of Jesus? All of a sudden, thousands and thousands of Jews and Greeks became Christians. Unthinkable! Yet, for some, the shift in beliefs was instant! Centuries of philosophy and theology drastically changed. Unexpectedly, they believed that life after death was possible, that Jesus had risen from the dead. What could account for this radical worldview shift? It



normally takes years for such a profound theological or philosophical shift to occur. With these people it was overnight. Why?

### *Was it a Delusion?*

Perhaps it was a mass delusion? This is unlikely since Christianity spread well beyond Palestine, across continents, centuries, and cultures. Moreover, the early Christians didn't really act delusional. Delusional people often withdraw from society. However, when other citizens abandoned cities to escape plagues and sickness, it was the early Christians that remained behind to tend to the sick. Instead of withdrawing from society, they remained and made life better. In his critical work on early Christianity, scholar Rodney Stark remarks:

Religion did not merely offer psychological antidotes for the misery of life; it actually made life less miserable. The power of Christianity lay not in its promise of otherworldly compensations for suffering in this life, as has so often been proposed. The truly revolutionary aspect of Christianity lay in moral imperatives such as "Love one's neighbor as one's self," "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and "When you did it to the least of my brethren, you did it to me." These were not just slogans. Members did nurse the sick, even during epidemics; they did support orphans, widows, the elderly, and the poor...<sup>9</sup>

The early Christians proved to be far from an eccentric cult. They were a compassionate people moved by the compassion of God in Christ. In fact, if the resurrection did happen, they had every reason to care for their neighbors. Unlike Greek philosophy, Christian theology sees the body worthy of resurrection and care. This would compel them to care for the sick and hurting. Jesus did not rise from the dead as a spirit or try to escape the body, as if a cage. Rather, he emerged from the grave in a renewed,

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<sup>9</sup> Rodney Stark, [\*Cities of God: The Real Story of How Christianity Became an Urban Movement and Conquered Rome\*](#) (New York: HarperOne, 2007), 30.

physical body. His post-mortem wounds reinforce his corporeal existence. According to the Gospels, the person the disciples saw was real, tangible flesh and bone. If this is true, then it makes sense for Christians to care for other's bodies (as opposed to the Greeks). The resurrection affirms the value of the human body. This implication of resurrection belief, which we will look at more closely in chapter four, shows us that the early Christians weren't crazy. Crazy people don't care for others *en masse* at their own expense.

### *Witnessing the Resurrection*

If belief in the resurrection wasn't a mass delusion, and thousands of Greeks and Jews abandoned their long-held beliefs about the likelihood of a resurrection, what can account for such a sudden shift in belief? *The only believable explanation is that they actually witnessed the resurrected Christ or heard from someone who saw Jesus in resurrected form.* Why else do an about face in personal conviction?

Perhaps it would be helpful to draw upon an analogy. Think of the staunchest Republican or Democrat you know. They know their political platform backwards and forward. They put signs in their yard for their candidates, bumper stickers on their cars, volunteer for party campaigns, proselytize others with their political convictions, blow up social media with their views, and never miss an opportunity to vote. Now, imagine that person suddenly switching parties. In an instant, they reverse their views on foreign policy, government, health care, same-sex marriage, gun control, and abortion. The Republican becomes a Democrat overnight; the Democrat goes Republican. Unthinkable, right? It was equally unthinkable for the Jews and Greeks to change their views. To shift from thinking the body is bad and worthy of escape, to believe that the body is good and resurrection worthy was inconceivable to Greeks. To conceive of a resurrection in the middle of history, by one man, was preposterous for the Jews.

Now add to this inconceivable worldview shift, the social cost that accompanied it. Family and friends would reject you. Others would scorn you. Rome would oppose you.

Nero would burn you. Why run the risk of social marginalization and personal sacrifice, if Jesus did not rise from the dead? The only reasonable explanation for this sudden shift in Greek philosophy and Jewish theology is that the first Christians must have seen the risen Jesus (mind you they weren't called Christians at the time). The Gospel writers and Paul attest: "that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas (Peter), then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time" (1 Corinthians 15:4-6). Hundreds of people, men and women, witnessed the resurrected Christ with their own eyes and they couldn't keep it to themselves. Could you? This death and resurrection of Jesus wasn't something that happened in a corner. It was public, on display for many to see. The experience of seeing Jesus resurrected from the dead apparently changed their beliefs in an instant. There was no reason to invent such an idea; it was completely implausible for Jews and Greeks. The only plausible explanation is that these witnesses were telling and recording the truth, namely that Jesus of Nazareth was not only crucified and buried but also raised from the dead. They must have changed their beliefs because they saw the risen Christ. Jews became Christians as they heard the story that the resurrection was actually beginning with Jesus, in the middle of history. Greeks suddenly believed, not only in life after death, but also that bodily life after death is good—that the body isn't a cage; it's a precious gift. And as a result, they were compelled to care for the lame, the poor and the needy. The resurrection changed everything.

So you see, if you struggle to believe the resurrection, you're like the many of the Jews and Greeks in Jesus' day, but if you still don't believe it, then you've got to come up with an explanation for this massive shift in belief, the hundreds of eyewitnesses, and the careful historiography of the Gospels. If after that you still don't believe, you should want to. You should want the resurrection to be true because it changes everything. Remember the implications of the resurrection. People aren't witless spirits or a random, meaningless series of biological mutations. They are made in the image of God and worth resurrecting. Let's consider one way the resurrection changes things then, in chapter four we'll look at several others.



## **Why You Should Want the Resurrection to be True**

I lost my best friend in college. Chris died of a self-inflicted gunshot to the head. I'll never forget when I heard the news. Walking through our apartment door from a long road trip, I entered to see a whole mass of people crowded in our living room. Morose mystery hung in the air. They knew something I didn't. "Sit down, I need to tell you something," said a friend. "No, I'll stand. What is it?" I replied. Chris has been shot; he's in the hospital in Dallas. I don't remember much else from the conversation. As the mystery dissolved, resolve set in. Just before midnight, I hit the road with my brother, contemplating the potential death of my best friend, for three and a half hours. During the drive, I oscillated from fear, to grief, to prayer, to depressing thoughts about a future without Chris. Death had come knocking, and I detested the sound. Reaching the annoyingly bright hospital around 3:00 am, I went straight to Chris' parents to comfort them and get a status. "It's not good," they said. "We're going to have to pull the life support. He's brain dead." I walked into the room and saw a bloated, lifeless version of my best friend. One look at him and I recognized him, but I didn't. It was a strange experience because he looked like Chris, but somehow I knew that he wasn't fully there.

The Bible teaches that our spirit goes to be with our Creator when we die, until God resurrects our body upon his return to earth to make all things new (Revelation 20:5; 11-15). Christian faith in a resurrected Christ reminds us that Jesus' resurrection was the first of many to come. Those who abandon faith in self and put their faith in Jesus' death and resurrection experience a death and resurrection of their own. Jesus defeats sin and death to give us, through his Spirit, a new life that is both spiritual and physical (Romans 8:10-11). In Jesus, there is hope for a true, imperishable, resurrection body that will never die:

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the

saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?" (1 Corinthians 15:52-55)

Although death is painful, it does not have the final say. Those who hope in the death-defeater have the promise of life forever. Staring at Chris, I was comforted by the promise that, when his body is reunited with his spirit, we will experience a grand reunion. Not even death could kill our friendship. One day there will be no more death, no bloated lifeless corpse, only bodily life in a joyous new creation, together. Chris is not condemned to wander Hades as a witless spirit for all eternity. His life was, is, and will be full of meaning.

### *Sentiment Versus Hope*

A lot of people share the sentiment of heaven without possessing heavenly hope. It's common for people to offer empty platitudes around death: "We'll see him in the afterlife" or "She's in a better place." While the resurrection certainly offers a promise of life after death, not a platitude, the promise only extends to those who have hoped in Christ in this life. Making this point, Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). Notice "resurrection" is *in Christ*. To those who hope in Christ for resurrection life, gaining life after death with him makes sense. To them, the new body is the penultimate reward. Christ, not the resurrection, is the ultimate reward. Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life—the most powerful, beautiful, creative person in the universe. Upon faith in him we gain a forever union with that stunning Person. This is why Paul can say, before death, "To live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21). He already knew resurrection life with Christ, in a spiritual sense, and looked forward to its consummation in a physical body. Therefore, those who possess only sentiment, not Christ, have no real hope for this resurrection. If they are honest with themselves, they do not even desire resurrection, in order to be with Christ, but only escape from death or some lesser hope. Those who hope in these lesser things (family, status, immortality) would find life with Christ infinitely

incongruent with their longings. They would, for instance, subordinate reunion with a loved one to Love himself. They do not want *the resurrection*, only some myth of a resurrection they have made up in their heads, one to falsely comfort them from the truth of death. Sentiment, then, is altogether different from hope. Sentiment is based on feeling (often a good one); whereas, hope is based on a promise. In this case, God himself makes the promise. Being the resurrection and the life, Jesus binds himself, in this life and the next, to those who hope in him. This is why my friendship with Chris could not be put to death. It was not because our friendship was so strong, so as to stand death on its own, but because our friendship was strengthened by a shared hope—the Resurrection and the Life.

### *Believing in God's Promises*

After Chris' funeral, I stopped by to see his parents. They had kept three suicide notes—one to his family, one to his girlfriend, and one to me. The legal size envelope was sealed and creased. I excused myself to open it in silence in their bedroom. With the door cracked, I sat down on a floral duvet and read in hopeful suspense: "I'm sorry, bro. I know this isn't right but I also know that He will never leave me or forsake me." He was alluding to Hebrews 13:5: "Keep your life free from the love of money, and be content with what you have, for he will never leave you nor forsake you." In his insane path to death, Chris still possessed a sane hope in life. He wrote these words torn between two promises, one false and one true. The false one promised life in death, an escape. The true one promised life after death. In Christ, Chris had every reason to live. In the haze of his sufferings, Chris could not make out Christ clearly. Sentiment beckoned him towards death; hope pointed him to life. With the promise of death in one hand and the promise of Christ in the other, he pulled the trigger. As he tripped into eternity, the enduring embrace of his loving Savior must have eclipsed the fleeting power of his sentiment. Death was not his hope; Christ was, and Christ will grant him a resurrection body one day in a grand reunion with the saints.

How do we make it across the river, from unbelief to belief in the resurrection? The same way the early Christians did, by an encounter with the risen Jesus. This encounter doesn't have to be with a visible Jesus. You'll recall that even his disciples doubted him at sight. Their sudden shift from unbelief to belief was sparked by faith in promises of the risen Jesus. His disciple John tells us: "when therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken" (2:22). His promises are still good for us: "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26).

Faith is the unnoticed ferry that takes us from the road leading up to the river, across its waters, to the other side of the resurrection. We don't get there by closing our eyes and wishing Jesus' resurrection was true. That is blind faith. This is informed faith. It is faith in an historically plausible resurrection, attested by hundreds of witnesses, and proven to be worth believing. Resurrection faith compels social action and offers genuine hope in suffering. Most of all it offers us Jesus Christ—the most powerful, beautiful, creative, fulfilling person in the universe. If you don't believe the resurrection is true, you should want to. I hope you'll weigh these reasons, reread the Gospel accounts of Jesus, and turn in faith to the God who died our death and gave us his life so that we might have the promise of life *before* death and life *after* death. Will you believe and live a resurrected life? It makes all the difference in the world.



## 2. Tracing the Resurrection?

*Then [Jesus] said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.” Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures, and said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead...”*

*- Luke 24:44-46*

If you're convinced of the plausibility of the resurrection, or even if you still doubt, it is also important to consider its narrative appeal. How does the seemingly nonsensical resurrection of Jesus make sense of the history of humanity? Does the greater story in which the resurrection takes place appeal to your longings? In this chapter we will trace biblical story through the scenes of *Creation of the World*, *Fall from Perfect Relationship*, *Redemption by Christ*, and *Renewed Future*.

Each of these big scenes has a central character that pushes the story along. There are twists and turns, sub-stories, and sub-plots that don't all fit together like a contemporary novel or film would, but in the whole narrative there are common threads that pull the story together. We will pick up the major plot line by selecting three central characters: Adam, Abraham, and Jesus. In doing so, we will make some sense out of the unfolding story, a story of life and death.

### **Creation of the World**

In the beginning, God created heavens and earth. He made everything and it was good. It was a place of universal thriving with rivers, animals, plants, and finally, the crown of God's creation—humanity. The first character we meet in the story, apart from God, is

Adam. Adam is created first then Eve. They are given abundant provision for human flourishing. They have life and purpose.

### *Abundant Life*

Imagine a world without disease, decay, or even death. Imagine having all the food, water, and shelter you need—forever. Now, picture the perfect mate created and given to you. Adam breaks out in song over his new wife. They walked naked and in intimate relationship. The story tells us Adam and Eve had no shame, no blame shifting, fights, or hurt feelings. They also had a vibrant relationship with God. God walked with them in the cool of the day. He taught them how to live and enjoyed their presence. God even spoke with them. Adam and Eve were close friends of God. He was present in their lives. This is the picture of life as it was supposed to be, and it was the way the world was for the first two humans. They were blessed.

### *Abundant Purpose*

When God made Adam and Eve in his image, he blessed them, and gave them a command: “*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth”* (Genesis 1:28). They were blessed to receive the command to “be fruitful and multiply” (make babies) and “subdue the earth” (make culture). By making babies and culture, they would populate and perfect creation. This would result in more rich relationships and create a kaleidoscope of human culture for them to enjoy.

The future is bright—God dwelling with humanity in perfect, trusting relationship. They are charged with spreading this rich relationship and creating culture in a way that reflected God’s gracious, creative rule. To carry out this command, God furnished them with everything they needed: one another, a garden, communion with him, rule over the creatures, and a single prohibition—eat from any tree in the Garden, except for one.

## **Fall from Perfect Relationship: Adam**

Essentially, they had it all. God's blessing would continue as they lived in obedience to his gracious kingship. Then the wheels came off. Before the grand project got far, they disobeyed the one prohibition God gave them. They didn't trust God; they didn't believe in his goodness, and they rejected their purpose. It was no accident. They distrusted their infinitely trustworthy Creator, thinking they could carve out a life better than the one God provided for them.

Immediately, they hid from God and blamed one another. Their relationships were instantly filled with an appropriate shame. After all, they had sold out their benevolent Creator and his perfect intimacy and broken trust with one another. The blessing was withdrawn and they were exiled from the garden. Their responsibilities were cursed—childbirth and work (making babies and culture) became extremely difficult. Their fall from perfect relationship with God is something we all feel today. Their ensuing struggle in childbearing and vocation continues. Perhaps you can relate to this difficulty? Anyone that has struggled to have or raise kids knows the effects of the Fall. Have you ever found work difficult? This, too, is the consequence of the Fall.

Pain, sweat, and death entered the world through their disobedience. Murder and exploitation soon followed (Genesis 4; 6:1-8). Adam and Eve, the humans commissioned to bring life to the whole world, end up bringing us death. The hope of the world hung on Adam's obedience, and that hope came crashing down with his disobedience. Through Adam's actions, relationship with God was utterly destroyed. Death entered the human story.

### *The Reverberations of Adam's Failure*

Reverberations of Adam's failure continue through time. Consider the impact of the Fall from perfect relationship in these lives.

Bob has never felt accepted or a sense of belonging. He went to an Ivy League school, owns a home in each of the most expensive zip codes in America. He divorced two wives and left three sons and a daughter behind. He has tried everything: adventurous vacations, expensive watches, and sexual pleasure. He spends most of his evenings in his Manhattan flat, lonely and self absorbed.

Sheryl is rejected and reject-able. Abandoned at five, she was raised by grandparents that beat her and by uncles that abused her in horrific ways. She was continually told she wasn't smart. She cheated her way through an Associates degree, while every man she slept with cheated on her.

Togo first killed a person when he was eleven years old. He was forced to pull the trigger by the man who killed his father and mother. His anger has been with him so long he doesn't even remember his parents. Now he is a warlord in east Africa, which secures him all the food he needs. Yesterday, he murdered two children who stole bread from him.

Cynthia has always done the right thing; even when her sister went "wild" she remained faithfully obedient to her parents. She made straight A's, married an accountant, and makes responsible decisions. She has never stolen, had more than one glass of wine, or cheated on her taxes. She is as perfect as you can imagine and thought she had earned a healthy family, marriage, and life. Her husband rarely talks to her; her parents disapprove of her choice in wallpaper. Her four-year-old son doesn't obey.

Jared is homeless, Tobias has AIDS, Karen has never heard anyone say: "I am proud of you." Jorge is orphaned, Sonia is starving, Grandma Jean is lonely, on and on the stories go. This present life does not resemble the garden God created with Adam. It resembles the broken relationships that left the garden in exile and the broken culture that ensued.

The only way to truly live is to live in relationship with God. The distrust and pride of humanity, what the Bible calls sin, destroys our relationship with God and distorts our relationship with others. The story of Adam is not that life is better with God, but that life with God is true life. Without a restored relationship with God, we cannot truly live. The abundant life and purpose of Adam are lost to death and sin. Apart from God, humanity cannot truly flourish.

### **Fall from Perfect Relationship Continued: Abraham**

Our next major character is Abraham. From Genesis 3-11 things go from bad to worse—murder, rape, and exploitation. God picks a new “Adam” named Abraham. In an attempt to redeem the damage done by Adam, God reissues a blessing and command to Abraham:

Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.” (Genesis 12:1-3)

God promises to make a lot of babies from Abraham (as many as the sand of the seashore) and a new culture, the nation of Israel. The command and blessing of Adam are restated, but with a twist. God will try to recreate the world from the inside-out. Instead of beginning with Adam’s global focus and working his way in, Abraham will start from within one family and work his way out to bless the world. God has selected a new Adam, sent him to a new “garden,” where they will make a new humanity to be a blessing to the whole world. Through this family, Israel, the entire world would be blessed in the same way Adam was blessed. Through Abraham, God would give abundant life and purpose to the world.



The hope of the world that hung on Adam now laid on Abraham and his family. Abraham does a pretty good job. He was not without failures, but he obeyed God's command (goes to Canaan) and trusted God's promise (to receive a child). He passed the responsibility to be a blessing to the world down his family line.

### *Life & Purpose for Israel*

Israel's calling was also to reflect the image of God. They were to show the world what he was like by being in close relationship with him (Exodus 19:3-4) and imitating his character. The rest of the world would be blessed through their radical trust and obedience in the one, true God. Through Israel, the world could have relationship with God. Throughout each generation, God would provide for their needs, win battles for them, protect them, and even speak and relate to them. God demonstrated to Abraham's nation, over and over again, that he was loving, compassionate, and merciful. In close trusting relationship with him, they had abundant life. In obediently loving God, they would fulfill their divine purpose.

### *The Failure of Israel: Misplaced Hope and Trust*

Alas, Israel failed in their mission. Instead of pointing the world to God through their love for him, they followed other people to their gods. They placed their hope and trust in idols made by human hands. From leaders to farmers, Israel joined the world in misplaced hope and trust. They rejected the blessing of being God's family and settled for less. Their infidelity wasn't confined to temples, but spread into the way they treated one another. They were supposed to be a nation that cared for the oppressed, but they disregarded the vulnerable. They were called to put themselves under God's rule and listen to his prophets, but they disregarded the prophets' words rejected God's purpose.

For hundreds of years, Israel experienced cycles of repentance (re-trusting in God) and subsequent rebellion (disobedience in the same old ways). Eventually, like Adam, they

were exiled from the land they were given. The history of Israel is the history of Adam: sin-exile-reboot.

The people that were supposed to bring blessing and life to the world, brought more sin and death. They couldn't even keep their own nation in order, much less be a blessing to all peoples. The hope of the world that hung on Israel's trust and obedience came crashing down with their distrust and disobedience. They exchanged life and purpose with God for cheap imitations with idols.

### *Reverberations of Israel's Failure*

Humanity seems prone to settle for less. We chose pleasure over life-long relationship, or comfort over lasting impact, or cheap clothes over justice. Many people approach Christianity this way, instead of firmly grasping the life Jesus offers, which is joyful and full of risk, they settle for an hour on Sunday or attendance on Easter. This is Adam-like and Israel-like. If you insist on this distortion of God's story, it will lead you right to the same place it lead Adam and Israel—exile from God and his garden.

### **The Success of Jesus: More Than Redemption**

The third major character in God's story is his Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus actually gets press in the Old Testament, where prophets write about the coming king that would restore and renew the entire world.<sup>10</sup> The writers of the New Testament pick up the thread of sin-exile-reboot in the characters of Adam and Israel and show us that Jesus is another iteration of both Adam and Israel. Paul writes: "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned...death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come" (Romans 5:12-14).

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<sup>10</sup> See the following Scriptures: [Genesis 3:15; 17:6; 49:10; Deuteronomy 18:5; 1 Samuel 2:10; 2 Sam 7:12-14; Isaiah 52-53.](#)

As it turns out, Adam was a type or shadow of “the one who was to come,” the true Adam. This Adam is also an Israelite. We are meant to see the hope of the world shifting off of the shoulders of both Adam and Israel and onto Jesus. But can he bear the hope of the world? Can he undo all the sadness and injustice, the sin and the exile of humanity? Or will he justly judge the world and reboot the whole thing? The hope of the world hangs on this Second Adam, this Israelite. Will he fail just as Adam and Israel or will he succeed?

As we read the story of Jesus’ life, we discover he was *radically* obedient to God. He loved his enemies, served the helpless, taught God’s Word, and kept his commands all the way through rejection, scorn, trial, imprisonment, scourging, mockery, torture, and bloody crucifixion. He was a blessing to all who knew him and even extended blessing to those who conspired to kill him. He died a martyr’s death.

Jesus is certainly admirable. His is the story of profound love. In fact, he was the one who coined this statement: “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friend” (John 15:13). Jesus loved his friends, and he loved the world. So, he died for it. His death was in its place. No matter how many sin-exile-reboot cycles occurred, the flaw was in the system, in the fallen state of the world. What humanity needed to flourish was for God to enter the system, to redeem and renew the world from the inside out. This happened through his death and his resurrection.

Many have laid down their lives for those they love. I’m sure you have heard or read similar stories of sacrificial love. Stories of the camp counselor who loses his life to save the life of a drowning child. The story of a soldier who takes a bullet for his fellow soldier. The story of a mother who gives all her food to her starving child, losing her own life. Or even, the story of a friend who assumes the guilt and punishment for a crime for the sake of the truly guilty. Some of our most treasured stories tap into this kind of sacrificial love. Victor Hugo’s Éponine dies to save Marius, Charles Dickens’ Sydney Carton dies in Charles Darnay’s place, Harriet Stowe’s Uncle Tom dies for Cassy and

Emmeline, J.K. Rowling's Lily Potter dies to save Harry, and many others. In fact, Jesus was not alone in death by crucifixion. In 4 BC, years before Jesus died on a cross, Roman general Varus crucified 2,000 Jews (Josephus, *Ant*, 17.10). Why, then, is the death of this Jew any different from all the other martyrs of history?

### *The Scope of Redemption*

The mere scope of Jesus' death sets him apart from any other martyr. Jesus' sacrifice was not for a few, as in the stories above, but for the many. His death was for people across ethnic, cultural, and even temporal lines. In Christ, we have a selfless death on behalf of all humanity. Jesus is also different because in Jesus we encounter the *obedient* Adam, the *faithful* Israelite who never disobeyed or abandoned God. This cannot be said about any other person. In Jesus we encounter the true Adam, the faithful Israelite who dies to bear our sin and our exile. As a result, we don't have to bear the punishment of death—exile from life with God. This is wonderful news but if we escape death how do we gain life? A loving martyr in a grave, while inspiring, doesn't change the world.

### *The Scope Jesus' Resurrection*

Here's the striking thing about Jesus' obedience and what's different about his death—he *was obedient not only to the point of death but also to the point of life*. He died to defeat sin, yes, but he rose to defeat death (Romans 5:15-21). Jesus' crucifixion is set apart from all other martyrs *because he did not remain dead*. The grave could not contain him. In fact, he isn't even a martyr; he's the death-defeater. By the first Adam came death, but by the second Adam came life! In 1 Corinthians 15:22, Paul says it like this: "*For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive.*" All who put faith in Christ are made alive with the power of his resurrection.

Through his obedience Jesus changes the world from the inside-out. Instead of judging us from a cloud, he enters earth to bring life out of death, joy out of pain, hope out of

despair. He was obedient not only to the point of death but also to the point of life. Jesus is living. His death restores a relationship and his resurrection ensures its eternal security. He lives and so do we. Jesus' trust and obedience is now a gift or a blessing to us. Jesus rolled back the failures of Abraham and his families by truly loving God. Jesus defeated the curse of Adam by restoring and reuniting humanity with God.

### *Resurrection Life*

Abundant life and purpose is restored in Christ. The life is the same: a restoring of deep intimate relationship with God. The purpose is also the same: reflect God's image and be a blessing to the world. The true Adam doesn't die and rise from the dead to create religious adherents. Instead, through his resurrection, Jesus creates a new humanity *that looks like him*. If you are in Christ, you have resurrection *life*! His death and resurrection becomes our death and resurrection, filling our existence with purpose and meaning. This life is ours now in the Spirit through the resurrection.

Now, this is where your story can intersect God's story. By faith in Christ you can receive new life and join God's redemptive agenda for the world. By faith in Jesus, we gain not just a better life but true life, life with God, full of love and purpose. The resurrection changes everything. In the film, *The Matrix*, Neo's death is followed by resurrection. He gets up after being shot to death by Agents, twists his neck, flexes, and the whole Matrix bends with his new life. The Operator watching can't make sense of it; the code's gone all crazy. Resurrection life looks crazy; it bends the rules of this world and frees us to live lives of radical sacrifice, generosity, love, kindness, humility, and mission. If we have received this blessing, then we will walk out our resurrection life by being new people that live in radical obedience to our great Savior. If you have not received this blessing, then all you need to do is give up on making a life for yourself and give into the life God has made for you in Christ. This is repentance and faith in Jesus, something we will address at length in the next chapter.



If you are in Christ, are people having trouble making sense of your life? Can they sense the vibrations of resurrection life, proving that Jesus has risen? If you're part of this new humanity then your life will reflect it. People will feel the resurrection. You will be a person of trust and obedience not just someone who receives a blessing. The story of Adam and Israel is redeemed in Jesus. Your story is redeemed by Jesus. The hope of the world hung on Jesus' obedience, and that hope is marvelously fulfilled in his obedience to the point of death and the point of life, resurrection life! In the resurrected Christ, we encounter the world to come—all things new. People should encounter that very same world in our lives.

### ***The Reverberations of Jesus***

What exactly do these 'resurrection vibrations' look like? Let's circle back to those broken stories we mentioned earlier and see how Christ's resurrection has suffused them with new life.

Bob is accepted by God and is using his gifts and finances to help repair a broken world. He sold some of his homes and started a business that empowers locals throughout Africa to build and repair their own water wells. It was scary, but he sought forgiveness and restored relationship with his former wives and children. He lives an adventurous life, trusting in God and obeying his commands. He spends most of his evenings in his Manhattan flat, marveling and God's love for him and his newly formed relationship. Bob is at peace.

Sheryl is adopted into the family of God. She is in a community of messed up people who, like her, are learning to trust and obey Jesus. They care for one another. She still doesn't have much in terms of possessions and struggles to forgive her relatives that abused her. She is living without shame and without blame. She lives confidently knowing God loves her.

Togo weeps at the forgiveness of Jesus. He has confronted the wrongs he has done and is facing the consequences in the international court. He faces life in prison. He knows that this is not justice and that he deserves so much more. He can't stop telling people about the hope and mercy he found in Christ. Togo is not angry. The region he used to control with an iron fist is now experiencing peace.

Cynthia stopped trying to earn the approval of others. No longer is she religious and self-righteous. Instead, she is finding the time to engage the resurrected life of humble service and joy. She and her husband are foster parents, trying to care for as many orphans as they can. She extends grace to her four-year old and listens to him. For the first time in a decade, Cynthia talks regularly with her rebellious sister. She doesn't care what her parents think about her wallpaper choices; she knows Jesus died and rose again for her.

There are billions of stories like this. This is life reshaped by the story of the resurrection.

### **3. Getting Into the Resurrection?**

*...if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.*

*- 1 Corinthians 15:17*

Even if the resurrection is intellectually plausible and part of a compelling story, does it really make a difference? What do we lose if we refuse to embrace the resurrected Christ? Let's consider what difference the resurrection really makes. Let's lift one sentence out of Paul's great chapter on the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15, which contains 58 verses of careful reasoning on the meaning and importance of the resurrection. Look at verse 17 straight in the face: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins." That puts it all on the line. If Christ hasn't been raised, the Christian faith is fiction and we are stranded in the fall of humanity, trapped in our imperfections. In order to understand how we can get into the resurrection, let's look closely at three key words in this verse that are often misunderstood—faith, sin, and Christ. If we can grasp the true meaning of these words, we will discern what difference faith in the resurrection really makes.

#### **What is Faith?**

The word "faith" often brings to mind negative connotations such as: irrational religion, wishful thinking, and even blind belief. The Apostle Paul actually says that faith is futile, if Christ has not been raised: "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile..." (1 Corinthians 15:17). This means that believing in Jesus as a great moral teacher or worthwhile philosopher isn't an option. That kind of faith, Paul says, is futile. Why is faith apart from the resurrection futile? The word futile actually means "fruitless." A fruitless faith is the result of putting your faith in something that isn't trustworthy. The object of your faith can't stand up to your expectations. For instance, you might put momentary faith in a new restaurant or bottle of wine, in order to experience some short

lived joy, only to then taste its “fruits” and be disappointed. Your faith in the chef or winery was misplaced. It was fruitless. Your faith was misdirected. Paul is saying: if God did not raise Jesus from the dead, then Christian faith is fruitless; it’s misdirected. This is especially interesting given the fact that Jesus lived an exemplary life, taught things that have influenced Western civilization for centuries, and suffered a substitutionary death for humanity at the cross. Even if you ruled out his morality and teaching, you’d still think that Jesus’ death would render Christian faith fruitful. But Paul insists that the cross is not enough. Good Friday needs the twin sister of the Empty Tomb for faith to be fruitful. Without the resurrection, Jesus’ teachings were a sham. Faith in Jesus requires faith in the resurrection. We’ll come back to this idea later on in the chapter, when we consider Christ. For now, let’s continue to explore the meaning of faith.

If you doubt one thing, it’s because you believe another thing. If you doubt that a supernatural resurrection is possible, it’s because you have faith in the natural, that only natural explanations can account for our world. Your doubt reveals where your faith is. In this case, your faith would be in science. The religious person isn’t the only one who possesses faith. So does the secular person. One believes that Jesus did rise from the dead; the other *believes* that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead. Both require faith. We are all creatures of faith.

Lesslie Newbigin said: “Doubt is not an autonomous activity.”<sup>11</sup> Doubt is not self-sufficient. It cannot exist on its own. It does not live in a vacuum. Doubt is propped up by faith in something else. To doubt one thing is to have faith in another. An atheist, for example, doubts God’s existence but puts faith in his non-existence. Even the atheist exercises faith that God does not exist. This puts everyone on the same playing ground. We are all creatures of faith. In the end, the existence or non-existence of God is beyond proof. We all take a “leap” of faith but that does not mean the leap is irrational. Although no one can prove that Jesus didn’t rise from the dead, there are helpful historical proofs

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<sup>11</sup> He continues: “one can only rationally doubt a statement on the basis of something else which one believes to be true. The critical principle destroys itself. If it is given primacy in the search for reliable knowledge, the end can only be total skepticism and nihilism.” Lesslie Newbigin, [\*Lesslie Newbigin: Missionary Theologian: A Reader\*](#) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 175.

(consider the argument of chapter one). We know God through faith alone; however, that faith is not in thin air. Christian faith is grounded in history, in the cross and the resurrection. So you see, we all possess faith, even those of us who doubt. If this is true, then it reframes the issue of the resurrection. If we all have faith, the question isn't, "Should I believe or not believe?" but rather, "Is my belief futile or fruitful?" Paul says if our faith is placed in the wrong thing, then we are still in our sins. This brings us to our second word, sin.

## **What Is Sin?**

Sin is a deeply misunderstood word. When people hear "sins," they often hear "rules." Some people like to break the rules; others like to keep them. The rule-breaking secularist and the rule-keeping religious person both miss the meaning of sin. What makes sin a sin? It isn't just that we break a holy rule. You might say there is a sin underneath the sin. Sin is desire for something more than desire for God. When we desire something else more than God, sin makes a god out of that thing. For instance, pride isn't a sin just because society tends to look down on it (though some forms of pride are rewarded). Nor is pride a sin simply because God says it's a sin (though he is opposed to the proud and shows grace to the humble). Pride is sinful because it makes a "self" into a god. The person who brandishes their rightness on a matter (silently or publically) lifts themselves up over others in order to find worth. They insist that others recognize that *they are correct*. The proud person will insist on being right, even when they are wrong. The surface sin is pride, but underneath lays the idolatry of *self*. The proud make a god out of self and being right (or great) instead of marveling at God's rightness and greatness. This is why God is opposed to the proud; because they set themselves up to be rival god. Both secular and religious people commit the "sin" of pride. Another way to restate sin is this—to sin is to place your faith in something other than God. The proud place faith in self.



## *“Secular” Sin*

Perhaps a couple personal illustrations will further clarify sin. In the human search for meaning and life, our desires go running in one of two directions—secular or religious. As I describe both in my own life, I invite you to consider how you may have gone in similar directions. First, the secular direction. A secular person removes himself from the supernatural story to find meaning and life on her own, in what she can understand and experience. I tried this path for a while. At nineteen, I went away to college, where I met a young cheerleader. I fell in love (or so I thought). I really fell in lust. We dated, slept together, snuck out of our dorm rooms to be together. I’d scrape money together, even if it broke the bank, just to get a hotel with her. I was in the throws of desire. Then, one night she called me in tears. We met in the dorm lobby, where she choked out her pain. Her father left an angry, cursing message on her message machine, and was coming to get her from school. Worse, she confessed to me that she had been abused by him growing up. He peeked in on her in showers, emotional and verbal abuse, and more. What should I do? I thought I loved her. I told my parents about the situation, then without telling them, I did what I thought was right. I decided to come to her rescue, by marrying her. That’s right, justice of the peace, in a shifty Tyler county legal office. We eloped. Excited I had done the right thing, I called my parents. I knew they would be so proud. I called on a pay phone. I’ll never forget the shrill cry of my mothers voice on other end of the phone. She was devastated. Angry, I told her she should be proud of me and that I loved this girl. Before hanging up, my mom said: “Jonathan, she’s not telling you everything.” This sentence rang in my mind over the next couple days. Clearly things hadn’t gone as planned, so we went home to make things right with our parents. It was during these couple days I discovered that my, now wife, had lied about everything.

Turns out she made up the story about the abuse because she was getting kicked out of school for bad grades. She knew I would come to her rescue, and therefore keep me. She lied all the way to that altar to keep me as her boyfriend, all the way into husband. I was stunned. An emotional wreck, I felt like someone had take a shotgun to my heart and

blown it into a thousand pieces. The Texas court issued a very rare annulment of the marriage based on fraud but nothing could annul the pain. I would numb it with woman after woman after that. I wanted to be deeply loved by a woman, to know intimate affection, sexual thrill, and relational intimacy. In many ways, I went on to live a secular life, as though God offered me no affection, intimacy, or love at all. As far as God was concerned, I felt only guilt and shame. I even went off to Bible School in the rolling green hills of the English Lake District to get things right with God, but instead I found another lover. I snuck out to be with her and to go drinking in the pubs. Eventually, I was found making out with her in an unoccupied room and was kicked out of Bible School, the very school where my parents met just twenty years earlier. I made another call to my parents, this time I was well aware of my shame. I tried “secular hedonism.” Some religious people would say my sin was sex before marriage. I broke that rule. But what was the sin beneath the sin? I wasn’t putting my faith in sex. My faith, my god-sized desire was for intimacy and affection from women to make up for an earlier woman’s twisted, deceitful affection. My “sin” was putting faith in women for a level of intimacy and affection that only God can provide. My faith in secular hedonism was fruitless. I was looking for an extraordinary thing (deep, never-ending intimacy), in a lovely but ordinary thing (women). Sure, I received temporary joy but not the deep love, meaning, and intimacy that only God can provide.

### *“Religious” Sin*

I also tried the religious path. Instead of trusting in reason and experience, the religious person trusts in religious activity for meaning and life. Like secularism, this can take all kinds of forms, depending on the religion of choice. In aberrant forms of Christianity, meaning and acceptance are supposed to be discovered through spiritual disciplines, church attendance, holy living, and evangelism. I tried this religious form of Christianity, where I put my faith in my religious activity. I had a genuine encounter with the risen Christ when I was six, taken by the notion that the God of the universe wanted me to be his son, to sweep me into his family to receive his perfect love. I knew God wasn’t offering me this privilege because I had accomplished so much, I was six, but

because he had accomplished so much for me in Christ. Yet, as I grew, I grew away from this childlike faith, and instead of trusting in Christ I began to trust in myself. After all the failures of my adolescence, I felt like I needed to do something to get back on God's good side. After all, I had pretty much blown it as a professional Christian—premarital sex, divorce/annulment, and kicked out of Bible school! I wanted to set things straight, to make up for my past, to make God proud. So I committed myself to rigorous Bible study, extended times of prayer and fasting, and asked God to break me over and over again over my sin. I sought out accountability relationships where I asked people to interrogate my holiness. They asked me questions like: Did you look at pornography? Did you have a devotional time each day? Did you handle your finances well? And at the end, did you lie on any of the above? A lot of these ordinary virtues became extraordinary in my own eyes. If I kept the list, I was high. If I broke the rules, I was low. I had taken God out of the center of my faith and replaced him with rules. This new set of religious rules helped me gauge my performance. I put my faith in my piety. The only problem was my performance. Sometimes I would break the rules, lack affection for God, fall back into lust, and prove ineffective in sharing my faith. My faith was futile because I was placing it my religious performance. What was the sin beneath the sin? It was self-righteousness. My desire was to be right, good, and holy enough for God without God's help. I made a god out of religion instead of worshipping God himself. I was proudly insisting I make my way to God, instead of accepting grace, that God had made his way down to me in Jesus. My superficial view of sin led me to put faith in rule-keeping not in Christ, who kept all the rules for me. My faith was in what I could do for God, not in what he had done for me. As a result, I was full of religious sin, self-righteous attempts to improve upon Jesus. My sin was self-righteousness and beneath that sin lurked the god of self. Self-motivated spirituality is dressed up form of pride. I put my faith in my religious performance. Even the religious person can have misdirected faith.

If both the secular and religious person are susceptible to sin—misplaced faith—then is there a way out of our sin? This brings us to Christ.



## Who is Christ?

Remember that Paul says if Christ has not been raised, that our faith is futile, and we are still in our sins. How does faith in a resurrected Christ rescue us from a tailspin of misdirected faith? How does the resurrection remedy the misplaced faith of the secular and religious person? Let's think about it in three ways. First, Jesus' resurrection implies his death, which forgives us for the cosmic crime of making a god out of our desires to be accepted, loved, beautiful, right, and great. The resurrection implies the death of God. Jesus takes our death sentence for making god out of our desires and not a god out of God. The cross gets us forgiven but what about those unfulfilled desires and languishing faith? If we just have the cross, we're doomed to a forgiven life of unmet desire. We're like the criminal who gets off/forgiven but continues to commit crimes. He has failed to appreciate mercy; otherwise it would utterly change his behavior. A resurrected Christ requires a dying Christ. Christ is the word for "messiah." As the messiah of the world, Jesus rescues us from the penalty and power of sin. This should floor us. Such mercy shown by God, at the cost of his very own Son, should change a man through and through, even if the change is gradual. Receiving this divine mercy for your sins is your first step into the resurrection.

The second reason Jesus is the right target for our faith is because he is the resurrection and the life. It is important to grasp that Jesus is not asking for faith "in the resurrection" *per se* (a supernatural event), but for faith in a resurrected Christ (a sublime person). Now, here's why faith in the resurrected Christ makes all the difference. Jesus' resurrection demonstrates his power over death, which also proves he uniquely has the power of life. By rising from the dead, Jesus is saying to the secular and religious person: "In your search for meaning, worth, acceptance, and love, I'm what you've been looking for. I alone can give you life. All that greatness, acceptance, beauty, love is all found in me. Your god-sized desire for intimacy is meant for a God, the God of life. Faith in women can't give you that. That's futile faith because it demands the extraordinary from the ordinary. Futile faith can't give you life. But a god-sized person who defeats death has all the power to give you what you are looking for. He can fulfill

all your heart's desires. When we put our faith in a resurrected Christ, we redirect all our desires to their origin, like tracing divine threads of joy, meaning, and purpose all the way back to the source. Jesus isn't scolding us for our desire to be loved, accepted, beautiful, or even experience greatness. He's showing us that he, alone is where we find true love, acceptance, beauty and greatness. The resurrection shows us that Jesus, alone, can give us life because he is the life: "In Him was life, and the life was the Light of men" (John 1:4). Receiving this tremendous life and light is how you step into the resurrection.

Third, the resurrection tells us that Jesus can satisfy our god-sized desires not only in this life, but in life after death. Those who put their faith in Christ are promised a resurrection body like his to enjoy his love, acceptance, meaning, beauty, and greatness forever. If Christ has not been raised, we are stuck in a tailspin of desire and a life of misdirected faith in this life and the next. However, if Christ has been raised we have forever fulfillment of desire and the final target for our faith. The resurrection points us to eternal life and felicity in Jesus. Faith in Jesus will bear fruit not just in this life but also in the life to come. Receiving this promise of bodily resurrection life will be our final step into the resurrection. If Christ has not been raised, we remain in our sins and our faith is futile. But Christ has been raised; therefore, your faith in him will be forever fruitful.

With faith, sin, and Christ cleared up a bit; we turn to the practical value of faith in the resurrected Christ.



## 4. Living the Resurrection?

*If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.*

*- Romans 8:11*

We have made our way through doubt, story, and faith in Christ. What remains to be discussed is the practice of the resurrection. Heeding the words of Jesus, we will first look at the benefits of living a resurrected life. Next, we will focus on the practical implications of having resurrection life. This chapter will explore the difference the resurrection makes for everyday discipleship.

### **Benefits: New Authority, Identity, Mission**

The last lines of Matthew's Gospel belong to Jesus himself. Believers in the resurrection cherish them because the final words of their Savior explain how to live the resurrected life. After his resurrection, and just before his ascension to the Father, Jesus tells his disciples how to be fruitful and multiply with their new, abundant life. He describes a life characterized by a new authority, a new identity, and a new mission.

Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matthew 28:16-20)

## ***A New Authority: Follow Me***

Jesus has all authority on heaven and earth. His authority eclipses the kings of Israel and the leaders of nations. All other kings die; Jesus vanquished death. All rulers are made, but all things were made by and for Jesus. His rule extends beyond the earth into the heavens, where he deposes powers and will bring all who are in opposition to surrender, establishing never-ending peace. Paul poetically describes his lordship:

[Jesus] is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Colossians 1:15-20)

In short, the risen Jesus has all the authority in the universe. Christ is profoundly great and good. He deserves our worship and obedience. Those who possess resurrected life joyfully acknowledge that Jesus is in charge and follow him. We listen to what he says, by reading his teachings, and we follow what he says, by lining our lives up with his teaching. A disciple learns to submit to Jesus in every facet of life. From waking up to going to bed, everything falls under his authority. Short-term plans and long-term investments are decided by his instruction. Living the resurrected life means placing yourself under Christ's rule. He is in charge and he is good at it. So know this—Jesus is no tyrant. He does not abuse his power. Rather, he is a loving and serving master. He is the master who washes his disciples feet. He is the king who lays down his life for his friends and, yes, even for those who doubt him. You are not cheated. You can run the cost-benefit analysis a million times, but it always comes out the same. The cost of submitting to Jesus pales in comparison to the rich relationship and future you have in Christ.

## *Four Ways to Follow Jesus*

- In Community. Following Jesus is communal. You need others and they need you. You share in struggle and daily remind each other of the abundant life and precious savior you have in common. Christians gather on Sunday to sing not only to God but each other: “Jesus rose from the dead!”
- In Prayer. Have you ever wondered why Christians pray? They pray because they know how dependent they are on God. Prayer is an invitation to know God and join his grace agenda for our lives.
- In Repentance & Faith. Repentance and faith are integral to the Christian life. Repentance is not feeling sorry to get on God’s good side. It is turning from the fleeting promises of sin to the superior promises of the Savior. It is seeing that, by grace, we are already on God’s good side and nothing else can compare to him.
- In the Story. Despite its age and apparent obscurity, the Bible is the story and inspired texts of God. It teaches us how to follow Jesus. We read it not to learn about extinct cultures, but to know and follow our Savior who was raised.

## ***New Identity: In Christ***

Resurrection life is nothing short of an entirely new identity. An identity is formed by what defines you. In American culture, your sexual orientation, your political party, your race, your religion, or your home state may define you. You can find identity in your occupation, your alma mater, your hobbies, and even your clothes. You can locate your identity by filling in the blank with “I am \_\_\_\_\_” statements.

- I am an accountant
- I am a Buddhist

- I am an alcoholic
- I am a vegetarian
- I am a Longhorn
- I am a skater
- I am white
- I am a democrat
- I am gay
- I am beautiful
- I am a hipster
- I am a disciple
- I am a Christian

Sometimes our identities are a composite. However, there some are typically stronger than others. How do you know which is strongest? Think about the one you just couldn't live without. If you can't imagine life living without it, you may have found your deepest identity. Each identity has a hidden mantra that goes something like: I am what I eat, who I sleep with, how I make money, what I wear, what I look like, or where I came from. Others are defined by their addictions and failures.

The interesting thing about many identities is that they come from what we *do*. The resurrected life is different. Instead of being named by the things we have done, we are named "in the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." We no longer have to be defined by our rise and fall in success and failure. Instead, our identity is defined by God's utter success over our sinful failures and his gift of new life. We have a *new* identity. The New Testament describes our newfound identity in various ways:

- Child of God
- Friend of God
- Servant
- Sent one or missionary
- Disciple

- Blessed
- New Creation
- Saint (Holy One)

This list only scratches the surface of our new identity in Christ. This is God's grace in the resurrected life. We don't deserve these wonderful identities. Yet, Christ's work is to give them to us. They all spring from grace—what he has done for us, not what we have done for him. He is Father to the child, Friend to the friend, Master to the servant, Ultimate Missionary to the sent one, Savior to the disciple, Resurrection to the new creation, Holy to the saint.

### *Empowered by the Presence of God*

Jesus' final words make it clear; we will not be abandoned: "And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." The resurrected Jesus is not in a distant universe or looking down from the clouds to see how well we are doing. He is with us and will be forever. The resurrected life is a continually restored relationship with God. We will not be exiled. We will not be alone. This is the ultimate benefit of following Jesus: Jesus *himself*. We can enjoy him daily. Like Adam and Eve before their rebellion, we can always walk the garden with God.

The promise of God's presence isn't a fleeting greeting on the inside of hallmark card. It is real comfort and power. As Jesus was preparing his disciples, he told them he would send them the Holy Spirit. In the Bible, the Book of Acts tells the story of how the Holy Spirit empowers normal disciples to follow Jesus. We see the Spirit empower ordinary people like you and me to speak the gospel boldly, obey Jesus commands, heal the sick, make disciples, give generously, and care for the poor. The Holy Spirit is the power of the resurrection for Jesus and for us: "And the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you" (Romans 8:11). The power of the resurrection is in us through the Spirit!

Now, we could easily read this think, “Okay, let’s get to work...maybe I can do this.” But if you set off in your own resolve, you will fall flat. I do. When I’m not living out of resurrection power (depending on the Spirit through prayer), I end up relying on emotional power. If I feel good that day, I’ll attempt to live out of my new identity and follow Jesus. If I don’t feel good, I’ll struggle to follow him. Either way, I miss the vibrancy of the Spirit. I quickly tire out, snap at others, or silently take credit for good things. I amass self-righteousness through self-dependence. However, when I begin the day with utter dependence upon the Spirit, drawing near to God in prayer, asking for his power and guidance throughout the day, it changes things entirely. Instead of tiring out, I’m filled up. Instead of snapping at others, I find a hesitating nudge from the Spirit to love and forbear. Instead of taking credit, I’m quick to give glory to God. The Holy Spirit enables you to live the resurrected life. He bears the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control, even in difficult circumstances. You don’t have to muster up the strength to follow Jesus. Instead, you get to rely on the strength of the Holy Spirit.

### ***New Mission: Make Disciples***

Matthew 28:18-20 is what Christians call the Great Commission, the dominant marching orders for all who have faith in Christ. It can sound a bit militant: “Take God’s authority and make disciples.” But remember, these orders are from the one who lays down his life. Ironically, our orders are to invite through imitation. The mission is to make disciples through our words *and* actions. Or, as Jesus said, “teach and obey.” In fact, it is when we experience the riches of renewal through Christ that we become, as Eugene Peterson says, “God’s advertisement to the world.”<sup>12</sup> We make disciples by living resurrected lives and telling people about the resurrected Christ.

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<sup>12</sup> Eugene Peterson, [\*The Practice of Resurrection\*](#) (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 13-14.



There's not a hint of coercion here. It's a life of love. Jesus wants us to spread the gospel throughout the world by spending our lives intentionally with others. Resurrection doesn't stop with us but travels through us. The commission is to invite. We get to invite others to join his redemptive agenda for human flourishing and the remaking of the world. We are sent to share the good news that Jesus has defeated sin, death, and evil through his own death and resurrection and is making all things new, even us. Jesus calls his followers to participate in his work of renewing the world.

### *Distinctive Discipleship*

Part of what makes this command great is its scope—*all nations*. When Jesus spoke these words, he was orienting a primarily Jewish audience to a distinctly multi-ethnic mission. We get the word, “ethnic” from the Greek word for nations, which doesn't refer to modernist geo-political states, but to non-Jewish ethnic groups (Gentiles). The commission is not calling disciples' to Christianize nation-states, but to share the good news of what Jesus has done with all ethnic groups. Christ does not advocate Christendom, a top-down political Christianity. Instead, he calls his followers to transmit a bottom-up, indigenous Christianity, to all peoples *in all cultures*. The command is to make disciples *of* all nations not *from* all nations. So, we aren't meant to exchange our rich culture for a cheap, consumer, Christian knock-off culture. Andrew Walls puts it well:

Conversion to Christ does not produce a bland universal citizenship: it produces distinctive discipleship, as diverse and variegated as human life itself. Christ in redeeming humanity brings, by the process of discipleship, all the richness of humanity's infinitude of cultures and subcultures into the variegated splendor of the Full Grown Humanity to which the apostolic literature points Eph 4.8-13.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Andrew Walls, [\*The Missionary Movement in Christian History\*](#) (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), 51.

What we should strive for is *distinctive discipleship*, discipleship that uniquely expresses personal faith in our cultural context. Disciples in urban Manhattan will look different than disciples in rural Maehongson. These differences allow for a flourishing of the gospel that contributes to the many-splendored new humanity of Christ. Simply put, the message of Jesus is for the flourishing of all humanity in all cultures.

With the benefits of living the resurrection in view, what does it look like to participate in the renewing of the world? Where do we begin? Jesus has painted a great picture of new life. Now let's look to the daily implications of resurrection life.

### **Implications: Risking for Humanity**

If Jesus rose from the dead, we have nothing to fear and have everything we need. All that we used to strive for or avoid has been taken care of by Jesus. For example, if Jesus rose from the dead, we no longer strive for acceptance. If Jesus rose from the dead, we don't fear death, because it has been defeated. Therefore, we can smuggle medical supplies into Burma, knowing our fate is already sealed. We can move to distant countries to invest in its development and renewal because Christ did the same for the entire world. Like the early Christians, we can care for the poor and marginalized in our cities. If we have resurrection life, we will have courage and we will risk.

A close friend of mine is starting a coffee roasting business with the aim of one day moving to Mumbai, India to aid and help an organization care for children and women caught in sex trafficking. It is holistic and risky. He purchases beans from India, roasts them, and sells them to raise awareness. The profits go back into helping folks start a new resurrected life. My friend could lose everything in the business. He is leaving his extended family and the comfort of home behind. The resurrected Jesus causes us to use all of our gifts and all of our lives for the flourishing of humanity.

Risking for humanity comes in all kinds of forms, from sacrifice to celebration. Let's look at four implications of resurrection life: give, party, and serve.

## ***Give***

Disciples of Jesus will no longer hoard what we never really needed. We will give it away. The hope of resurrection frees us to live generous lives. We will look at our hands, bank accounts, homes, and our time and ask, “God how can I be a blessing to your people?” There is no need to hoard possessions while you live an abundant life. You will invest your life in the calling to make disciples. This is no overnight task; it is something that takes a lifetime. Making disciples will bring you joy and hardship. After all, our invitation is radical—exchange your authority for Jesus’ authority, you self-made identity for his better identity, your purpose for his purpose. But when this is done in the power of the resurrection, every gift and sacrifice will be a reminder of the greatness and goodness of the resurrected Christ.

## ***Party***

Those with resurrected life will regularly pause and celebrate how good we have it. We will sing, dance, paint, and bake all in the praise of God’s goodness. We will marvel at the story of God and the honor we have to participate in it. We will invite the shy, awkward, and rude. Our parties will be open and welcoming because we know that Christ came to us when we were not desirable and invited us to join him.

This is fun. The 4th of July is a major holiday one of the high points in our community’s calendar. It marks the first day of summer and our front yard becomes a party-space as neighbors, co-workers, and friends gather to celebrate on our front porch. It is a day marked by good drink, good food, and good conversation for everyone (young and old). We start at lunch and go until dark, when we shoot off small firecrackers in the street with all the neighborhood kids. The 4th of July is a good day. The first year we did this was marked by an impromptu jam session. I found myself playing bass guitar on a neighbor’s porch four hours. Alongside me was a semi-retired artist, a realtor, a random friend from out of town, and a chorus of folks dancing and cheering us on and little kids

colored every inch of the sidewalk with chalk. The day was not about Declaration of Independence, but about community gathering together.

I live in a city where less than 4% believe in Jesus. Much less go to gatherings of Christians to celebrate Jesus. While most of the city is making brunch plans, our church is meeting in a dance venue. Musicians are crafting tunes and taking musical risks as they invite everyone to participate. Hundreds listen diligently to a teacher expound on the story of God. People shout, sing, dance, and smile. Why? Because Jesus rose from the dead and that makes us overly happy, even on a Sunday morning.

Let me share a simple illustration of giving out of the abundant life. My wife makes the best cookies in the world. I didn't come to that conclusion on my own, but after constant comments from people all over the world. I won't give away the recipe but within each bite you will experience the pleasing combination of Nutella, dark chocolate chips, sea salt, and browned butter. It is a three-stage process that changes people's lives. We also live in an upper-middle class neighborhood where everyone has everything they need. Blessing and giving for my wife looks like baking cookies on the dark and rainy days of Portland and giving all of them away. As kids and adults arrive home from long days in school and work, they are met by warm cookies. While they are working hard throughout the day, she is working hard to bless them on their return. She gives up her day for the benefit of others. Our neighbors are overjoyed, thankful, and honestly comforted. Who doesn't like coming home to homemade cookies? It is simple, but this is a picture of the resurrected life. Giving abundant and exceedingly excellent gifts.

### ***Serve***

If Christ has done everything to reconcile you to himself, we will we seek reconciliation with others. You will be free to follow Jesus in caring for the vulnerable and those who need to hear the story of God. It will be a struggle and a sacrifice. You will fight for reconciliation. Where there are disagreements, you will fight for peace. Where there is injustice, you will serve holistically to bring justice. Jesus did everything to restore the

relationship between God and humanity, and you join in the restoring of relationships among people. This may take the form of adopting orphans or caring for teenage mothers. It could look like hosting the homeless and visiting prisons. You will fight for justice and for people to be treated as if God gave his only Son for them. You will daily ask: “How can I bring hope and love into this world, city, or neighborhood.”

The Pauls are in their 50s and live in inner Portland. Their neighborhood is a cocktail of the rich and poor. Historically this has been a low-income area of the city, but now it has become a haven for the city’s creative class. They intentionally moved in to make disciples. Almost instantly, they became grandparents to the neighborhood. Opening their home for art camps, garden clubs, and college football on Saturdays. Beyond events, they have invested relationally in the neighborhood from the gas-station employees to small business owners. They are famous for serving and sharing God’s love with everyone.

What is remarkable to me, and to their neighbors, is the Pauls’ story. The Pauls are from Arkansas and were well on their way to a retirement of babysitting their grandchildren when they felt God call them to Portland. They had a comfortable, suburban home, but left that comfort to go to a culture and city completely foreign to their own. They arrived in the city as servants, dedicated to giving their lives away. If you ask them how it’s going, they will smile and say: “I can’t imagine living any other way. I won’t go back to the way things were before.” The resurrected life looks like joyful service.

*Why?*

Jesus tells those who follow him to leave all they have behind, to give their lives to the poor, to love their enemies, and be a blessing to the world. The resurrection enables us to follow Jesus. We do not hold back because we live with the certainty that death and sin have been defeated. His death and resurrection has become our death and resurrection. We have a new authority, identity, and mission. This is why we give, party, and serve.

## **Dream of the World to Come**

The end of the Bible describes a day when everything is made new. John, one of the first followers of Jesus, describes this future day in a dream like this:

And I saw the holy city...coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away. (Revelation 21:1-4)

This is the day when God literally dwells with humanity. No more tears, death, mourning, or pain. All of those things will be gone. The resurrection began a chain of events that will lead to this future time, when everything is as it should be. All things made new. Today, we can live in light of that certain dream. The loud voice from the throne in this passage of Revelation is the voice of resurrected Jesus.

Hope, not sentiment, reminds us that we can rest each night knowing this day will come. It is a promise. As certain as the Sunday morning when the tomb was empty, there will be a day when the God dwells with his people in a place without even the faintest hint of sin. We will rest in him forever.

Until then, those with resurrection life can persevere in giving, celebrating, and serving because we know we are part of a greater story. We continue on, even when there doesn't seem to be any momentum or fruit, because we have joined the resurrection now. We remember that Jesus has been raised as a preview of the life to come. This is world renewing resurrection.

*Standing on the other side of the river, I can tell you resurrection life is worth believing in. It is powerful in the mundane, resonates louder the closer we get to others, motivates for the flourishing of humanity, but more importantly it draws you into perfect relationship with the most powerful, beautiful, creative Person in the universe—the risen Christ. The beloved disciple describes him:*

And in the midst of the seven golden lampstands one like the son of man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash around his chest. The hairs of his head were white, like white wool, like snow. His eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined in a furnace and his voice was like the roar of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, from his mouth came a sharp two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining in full strength.  
(Revelation 1:13-16)

*Take a look at the cover of the book. Will you take the ferry across the river of the resurrection? Will you redirect your faith to the resplendent Jesus? He would love to have you over here, and so would we. Life with Jesus is better than anything you can imagine, and this life is just the beginning.*



## About the Authors

**[Jonathan K. Dodson](#)** (MDiv; ThM) serves as a pastor of [City Life Church](#) in Austin, Texas. He is the author of [\*Gospel-Centered Discipleship\*](#) and [\*Unbelievable Gospel\*](#). He has discipled men and women abroad and at home for almost two decades, taking great delight in communicating the gospel and seeing Christ formed in others.

**[Brad Watson](#)** serves as a pastor of [Bread&Wine Communities](#) in Portland, Oregon. He is also the director of [GospelCenteredDiscipleship.com](#). His greatest passion is to encourage and equip leaders for the mission of making disciples.