

## “Resurrection”

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*1 Corinthians 15:1–8 (ESV)*

<sup>1</sup> Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, <sup>2</sup> and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. <sup>8</sup> Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.<sup>1</sup>

We all know there are a lot of candidates campaigning to be the next president of these United States of America. But I bet most of you don't know of a candidate named Zoltan Istvan. He is the Transhumanist Party's candidate for president. Transhumanists believe that at some point in the near future, humans will combine with artificial intelligence and some form of robotics so that they will transcend the human race as we know it and become immortal. When that happens, humans—or transhumans—will live forever. At least, that's what Zoltan Istvan believes. Specifically, he believes that complex brain scans will be able to capture a person's personality and consciousness, which can later be transferred to robots. He says, “In the next 20 years we're going to become cyborgs, we're going to become healthier, and probably a lot more interesting.” Istvan used to be a journalist who worked for *National Geographic*. While in Vietnam on assignment, he almost died by stepping on a land mine. He says, “That's the moment I decided I would dedicate my life to preventing death for me and my loved ones.”<sup>2</sup>

I can understand Istvan's desire to avoid death. Given the opportunity, who wouldn't want to do that? But his project is a pipe dream. It's not going to happen. We won't achieve immortality by merging humans with computers. That's like trying to implant the DNA from the cacao tree into a chicken in the hopes that it will lay chocolate eggs.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

<sup>2</sup> Ellie Zolfagharifard, “Will YOU Live Forever? Presidential Candidate Claims Technology to Transform Us into Immortal Cyborgs Is within Reach,” *Daily Mail*, December 30, 2015, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3379397/Will-live-forever-Presidential-candidate-claims-technology-transform-immortal-cyborgs-reach.html> (accessed January 16, 2016).

The fact is that death is a part of life in this fallen world. We all know this firsthand. It's the major problem that we face in life. Everything comes to an end. Many of you know this better than I do. You've lost parents and siblings and other people you love. Some of you go to more funerals than you do movies.

All of this reminds of a joke I once heard. I was visiting a member of my last church, in Washington State. She lived in a nice assisted living facility, where everyone had their own apartment. During my visit, the one woman I was visiting said, "People are calling this place the 'frog house.'" I was puzzled. The "frog house"? So I asked her what that meant. She said, "Yes, the frog house, because people keep croaking here." Apparently a number of residents at that assisted living facility had died recently.

The sobering reality is that all our lives will come to an end. Each one of us will be gone some day. We'll all be laid in a casket and buried, or have our ashes put in an urn to be placed on a mantle or scattered somewhere. Death remains the major problem that confronts all of humanity, and despite what transhumanists say, we won't be able to beat it. Death reminds us that human beings have limits.

Last fall, I read an interesting book by a French philosopher named Luc Ferry. The book is called *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*. It's important to know that Ferry is an atheist. He describes philosophy as basically an attempt to figure out how to live in a world in which we will all die. He says this of man: "He knows that he will die, and that his near ones, those he loves, will also die. Consequently he cannot prevent himself from thinking about this state of affairs, which is disturbing and absurd, almost unimaginable."<sup>3</sup> What is it that all humans want? "To be understood, to be loved, not to be alone, not to be separated from our loved ones—in short, not to die and not to have them die on us."<sup>4</sup> Ferry says that all religions and philosophies are an attempt to find salvation from the fear of death. What's interesting is that though Ferry is an atheist, he says, "I grant you that amongst the available doctrines of salvation, nothing can compete with Christianity—provided, that is, that you are a believer."<sup>5</sup> I suppose the reason he says that is because Christianity promises life after death to believers. It promises that death is not the final word. The problem for Ferry is that he doesn't believe it.

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<sup>3</sup> Luc Ferry, *A Brief History of Thought: A Philosophical Guide to Living*, trans. Theo Cuffe (New York: Harper, 2011), 2-3.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

Today, I want to talk about the resurrection of Jesus. It's so important to understand this part of the Bible. Without it, there's no salvation from sin and death and no promise of eternal life. So I'll read through Matthew's account of Jesus' resurrection and I'll help us understand the passage. Then I'll give us some reasons why we can trust that Jesus' resurrection is true, that it's an actual event that happened in history. Then I'll tell us what the resurrection means for us as individuals and what it means for us as a church.

So let's turn to Matthew 27:55-28:15:

<sup>55</sup> There were also many women there, looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, <sup>56</sup> among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee.

<sup>57</sup> When it was evening, there came a rich man from Arimathea, named Joseph, who also was a disciple of Jesus. <sup>58</sup> He went to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate ordered it to be given to him. <sup>59</sup> And Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen shroud <sup>60</sup> and laid it in his own new tomb, which he had cut in the rock. And he rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away. <sup>61</sup> Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb.

<sup>62</sup> The next day, that is, after the day of Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered before Pilate <sup>63</sup> and said, "Sir, we remember how that impostor said, while he was still alive, 'After three days I will rise.' <sup>64</sup> Therefore order the tomb to be made secure until the third day, lest his disciples go and steal him away and tell the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last fraud will be worse than the first." <sup>65</sup> Pilate said to them, "You have a guard of soldiers. Go, make it as secure as you can." <sup>66</sup> So they went and made the tomb secure by sealing the stone and setting a guard.

<sup>28:1</sup> Now after the Sabbath, toward the dawn of the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. <sup>2</sup> And behold, there was a great earthquake, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. <sup>3</sup> His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. <sup>4</sup> And for fear of him the guards trembled and became like dead men. <sup>5</sup> But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. <sup>6</sup> He is not here, for he has risen, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. <sup>7</sup> Then go quickly and tell his disciples that he has risen from the dead, and behold, he is going before you to Galilee; there you will see him. See, I have told you." <sup>8</sup> So they departed quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. <sup>9</sup> And behold, Jesus met them and said, "Greetings!" And they came up and took hold of his feet and worshiped him. <sup>10</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "Do not be afraid; go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me."

<sup>11</sup> While they were going, behold, some of the guard went into the city and told the chief priests all that had taken place. <sup>12</sup> And when they had assembled with the elders and taken counsel, they gave a sufficient sum of money to the soldiers

<sup>13</sup> and said, “Tell people, ‘His disciples came by night and stole him away while we were asleep.’ <sup>14</sup> And if this comes to the governor's ears, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble.” <sup>15</sup> So they took the money and did as they were directed. And this story has been spread among the Jews to this day.

I want to point out a few things from that passage. First, there were a number of women who saw where Jesus was buried and who came back to the tomb in order to anoint his body with perfumes and spices (Mark 16:1; Luke 23:56-24:1; cf. John 19:39-40). According to Darrell Bock, “The Jews did not embalm, so the spices and perfumes help to calm death’s stench and slow decomposition.”<sup>6</sup> What’s important about all of this is that there were witnesses who saw where Jesus was buried. There was no mistake about which tomb he was placed in, and which tomb was later empty. I also want to point out that the four Gospels make it clear that women were the main eyewitnesses to Jesus’ burial and resurrection. This is one of the details that indicates that this story is true. If you were someone living almost two thousand years ago, trying to make up a story about a man who died and came back to life, you would never say that the people who saw it were women. In the first century in Palestine, a woman’s testimony was almost useless. In that male-dominated society, a woman’s testimony would be heard in court only in rare cases.<sup>7</sup> If you were making up a story, you wouldn’t have women as the first witnesses. You would have men, and probably wealthy, upstanding men, be the first witnesses. No one would write this—unless it were true.

Second, Jesus was buried in the tomb of a rich man, Joseph of Arimathea. He was both a follower of Jesus and a member of the Sanhedrin (Luke 23:50-51). This fulfilled a verse in the Old Testament written over seven hundred years earlier. Isaiah 53:9 says,

He was assigned a grave with the wicked,  
and with the rich in his death,  
though he had done no violence,  
nor was any deceit in his mouth.

Joseph shows us how someone responds in faith to Jesus’ death. He gave a precious gift to honor the Lord. Isaiah 53 also predicted the Messiah’s resurrection. The very next verse (verse 10),

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<sup>6</sup> Darrell L. Bock, *Luke: 9:51–24:53*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 1877.

<sup>7</sup> Flavius Josephus the Jewish historian, writes in his *Antiquities* 4.8.15, “But let not the testimony of women be admitted, on account of the levity and boldness of their sex.”

says of the Messiah: “he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days.” The Messiah will live on after his atoning death, and that’s exactly what happened to Jesus.

Third, there were others who didn’t trust Jesus, who didn’t believe he was the Christ. So the Jewish religious leaders—the chief priests and Pharisees—went to Pontius Pilate, the Roman leader of Judea, to have the tomb guarded. These leaders heard that Jesus had predicted his own resurrection (Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 17:22-23; 20:17-19). But they didn’t believe it was possible. Instead, they thought that Jesus’ disciples might steal the body. What’s interesting is that Justin Martyr (100-165), writing in the middle of the second century, states that this was the Jewish claim regarding Jesus. Apparently, roughly a hundred years after the event, some Jews claimed that the disciples stole Jesus’ body.<sup>8</sup> However, if the tomb were guarded by Roman soldiers, there is no way that Jesus’ disciples would have been able to steal the body. Roman soldiers knew how to kill. Jesus’ disciples are depicted in the Gospels as cowardly.

Fourth, when the women see the resurrected Jesus, they worship him. This shows that Jesus is God. He didn’t try to correct them (cf. Rev. 19:10; 22:8-9). Instead, he received their worship and told them not to fear.

Fifth, a story was made up to counter the real story of Jesus’ resurrection. Some of the guards who had passed out when the angel arrived at the tomb later reported what happened to the authorities. The chief priests and elders bribed the guards to tell a false story, that the disciples had stolen the body. The chief priests and elders were willing to bribe Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, too. As I said earlier, we have evidence that this story was told among some Jewish people well into the second century.

So that’s Matthew’s account of the resurrection. Of course, Mark, Luke, and John have their own accounts, and each one is a bit different. And that’s a good thing, because it gives us four different witnesses to this event. If the four accounts were exactly the same, we would be suspicious. We would think these Gospel writers gathered together and corroborated their stories. We might even suspect that one person or one group of people made this story up. But that’s not what happened.

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<sup>8</sup> In his *Dialogues with Trypho*, Justin has Trypho, a Jewish man, say to Justin, “you have sent chosen and ordained men throughout all the world to proclaim that a godless and lawless heresy had sprung from one Jesus, a Galilæan deceiver, whom we crucified, but his disciples stole him by night from the tomb, where he was laid when unfastened from the cross, and now deceive men by asserting that he has risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.” Justin Martyr, “Dialogue of Justin with Trypho, a Jew,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 253.

There's no reason to think the disciples made up this story. As I said earlier, if they made it up, they wouldn't place women at the tomb as the eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection. Also, the disciples had nothing to gain by making up this story. In the Roman Empire, the claim that there is one true God, and the God-man Jesus is not only the Christ (or Messiah), but the King of kings and Lord of lords, would not get you power or money. In fact, such a claim would be more likely to get you the death penalty, because this message was a challenge to the claim that Caesar was Lord.

Also, no one in Judaism was expecting that God would become man, die, and be raised from the dead in the middle of human history. British theologian N. T. Wright makes this point repeatedly.<sup>9</sup> Again, no one would make this up. No one would write it down and try to pass it off as something that actually happened—unless, of course, it actually happened.

There's simply no evidence that this story was concocted by a group of coconspirators. Though we have several accounts of Jesus' death as well as a number of historical witnesses to the fact that the disciples claimed to see Jesus risen from the dead, we don't have any writings from the first century that say that Jesus didn't die and that he didn't rise from the grave. I'm not going to go through all of those historical witnesses today, but if you want to know more information, you can go the church website and find the "Media" tab. Under that tab, you can find "Articles," and you'll find one called "Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus."<sup>10</sup> There, you'll find a number of reasons why we can believe the resurrection of Jesus is true. You can also go back and find the sermon I gave last Easter, "Jesus Rose from the Grave."<sup>11</sup> If you go that article or that sermon, you'll find good reasons to believe that miracles are possible and that the New Testament is historically reliable. You will also see that the counter-arguments people make, like Jesus didn't actually die, or the disciples had some kind of hallucination, just aren't possible. If you're here today and you don't believe this is true, I would love to be able to talk to you. I would point you to those resources on our website. I would encourage to think about the arguments and the evidence. Really, your eternal destiny depends on it.

I think a lot of people find the resurrection hard to believe because it simply sounds too good to be true. A dead man came back to life! And he didn't just come back to life in a normal

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<sup>9</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Resurrection of the Son of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God (London: SPCK, 2003), 573-574, 689, 700.

<sup>10</sup> <http://wbcommunity.org/resurrection>.

<sup>11</sup> This sermon was given on April 5, 2015, and can be found at <http://wbcommunity.org/jesus>.

body. He came back to life in a body that can never be destroyed. The reason this is good news is because Jesus is, according to Paul, “the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Cor. 15:20). The “firstfruits” is the first of a crop. The firstfruits is followed by a lot of other fruit. So if Jesus is “the firstfruits” of those who have risen from the dead (those “who have fallen asleep”), that means that more will rise from the dead later. In other words, because Jesus rose from the grave in a body that can never die, we have hope that all who are united to Jesus will have a future resurrection. All Christians will come back from the grave and be reanimated in bodies that won’t have handicaps, or diseases. We’ll have bodies that are indestructible. That’s why the resurrection is such a big deal.

That’s what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15. First, he writes what was read earlier (verses 1-8). There, Paul seems to be reciting an early creed, a statement of faith. The earliest Christian teaching is that Jesus died for the sins of his people and rose from the dead on the third day, appearing to Peter, then the rest of the disciples, and then to more than five hundred Christians, and then his brother James, and finally Paul.

Paul says that the resurrection is so central to Christianity that if it’s not true, Christianity isn’t true. He writes, in verse 14, “if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain.” Then he says, in verse 17, “And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins.” He continues to say, in the next verse, “Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.” In other words, if Jesus didn’t rise from the grave, then Christians who have died are dead, and they have no hope of life in the future. They’re just gone like everyone else. That’s why Paul says, in verse 19, “If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied.”

Then Paul continues, beginning in verse 20, with this passage:

<sup>20</sup> But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. <sup>21</sup> For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. <sup>22</sup> For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. <sup>23</sup> But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. <sup>24</sup> Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. <sup>25</sup> For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. <sup>26</sup> The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

That passage is important for understanding the whole story of the Bible. Adam, the first man, represented all humans who were born after him. And Adam sinned. Because Adam sinned, he

would die, and so would all humans born after him. But Jesus is the “last Adam” (1 Cor. 15:45). And through him comes the resurrection of the dead. So all who are associated with Adam will die. But all who are associated with Jesus will have life after death. After death, they will be made alive. Jesus is the “firstfruits.” He is the down payment, the first installment, of the resurrection. But he’s the only one who will be resurrected until he returns. When he returns, all Christians will then be raised to eternal life in glorified bodies—bodies that can’t and won’t die again. And then will come the end of human history, when all rule and authority and power that sets itself up against God will be destroyed. The last enemy he will defeat is death itself. Death will be a thing of the past for God’s people. There will be no more pain and suffering.

I want to focus on two particular implications of the resurrection in the rest of the time that I have left. Here’s the first implication: The resurrection hasn’t occurred yet. We’re not living in the new creation—the new heavens and earth—yet. But the promise that everyone who puts their trust in Jesus will experience that resurrection life in a perfect world means that we can suffer well right now. We can deny our desires, knowing that all our greatest desires will be met in eternity. Paul himself could do that. In fact, Paul says just a few verses later in 1 Corinthians 15 that he was in danger every hour (v. 30). As an apostle of Jesus, someone sent by the Lord to tell others the gospel, he faced dangerous circumstances. Why would he risk his life to do this? Because he knew that everlasting life awaited him. He said, “I die every day!” (v. 31). Every day, Paul was willing to put his life on the line. I think it’s fair to say that Paul also saw every day as an opportunity to put his old self to death. Paul saw that this life was intended to be spent for God. So Paul didn’t cling to the pleasures of the world.

That’s why Paul says, in verse 32, “What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought with beasts at Ephesus?” That’s probably not a literal reference, but a way of saying that he fought opposition in the city of Ephesus. Then he says, “If the dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.’” Paul is quoting Isaiah 22:13. In context, those are the words of people who were in Jerusalem, who were under siege by the Assyrians. Instead of repenting and weeping, they said, “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.” They were going to party like it’s 1999, to quote that great prophet, Prince. Today, people may have that view, too. If this life is all there is, let’s live it up. Let’s grab as much as we can. Let’s have as much pleasure as we can. “You only live once,” so just do it, whatever makes you happy. But Christianity says something very different. It says that if you are united to Jesus, you can’t do whatever you feel



like. Jesus is your Lord, your King, your boss. So you must do what he wants you to do. But here's the thing: Jesus wants you to use your life in a meaningful way. He doesn't want you to waste it on things that won't last. He wants us to live lives that matter now and lives that matter forever. He also wants us to experience the greatest pleasures in eternity with him.

That's why Christians shouldn't get caught up in materialism, trying to have as much stuff as possible. We shouldn't get caught up in trying to have the nicest houses, or the nicest cars, or clothes. Now, it's not bad to have things, and to even have some nice things. It's not bad to have a nice house or to enjoy the things of this world. But we can't make those things so important that we don't give generously, and even, in some sense, sacrificially. We can give now knowing that we'll be rich in eternity.

We don't really know what life will be like when God restores the world into a perfect creation. But I think our experience will be so great there that any pleasure we seek now will pale in comparison. So we're able not to seek out pleasures the way everyone else does, knowing that we're not being robbed of anything.

I'll give you an example: I would love to do more traveling. I enjoy it when I get the chance to travel, but the fact is that I don't have a lot of money to travel everywhere I'd want, and do everything that I would like to do. If I thought this life was all there is, I'd find a job that provide me enough money and gave me enough time off so I could travel more. But I'm okay with not being able to see every country or city I would like to see now, because perhaps I'll have eternity to visit those places. I'm not sure that's really how things will be, but what if I have eternity to explore every place I had ever wanted to see? By not grasping onto things in this life, I'm not really losing anything.

And the hope of a resurrected life spent in a perfect world means we can suffer now. Some of us are suffering physically, and the reality is that things will only get worse until we die. Jesus suffered and died before his resurrection, too. He could endure the pain and shame of the cross because of "the joy that was set before him" (Heb. 12:2). That joy for Jesus must have included obeying the Father, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven and his exaltation. It might have included also the knowledge that his death would save his people. So Jesus could endure something painful in order to gain something greater.

So that's the first implication: Because a resurrection awaits those who believe in Jesus, Christians can deny certain desires and can even suffer, knowing that something greater awaits.

And that leads me to the second implication of the resurrection that I want to explore this morning. The lives of Christians are supposed to follow the pattern of Jesus. The life of the Christian is cruciform, or cross-shaped. That means that we will experience tribulation and persecution and suffering now, and even death, but that all of this will lead to resurrection and glory (Rom. 8:16-17; 2 Cor. 1:5; 4:7-18; Phil. 3:8-11; Col. 1:24; 2 Tim. 1:8, 2:12; Heb. 10:36). Our sufferings unite us to Christ. They shape our character. They help us rely on God and not ourselves (2 Cor. 1:9). And our sufferings prepare us for something better. That's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:16-18:

<sup>16</sup> So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, <sup>18</sup> as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

If you follow the flow of that passage you'll see that whatever difficulties we have now prepare us for something greater. That's such an important idea. Last week, I said that we have to put to death our old selves. And that's true. But we don't put to death our old ways, our old habits, our old desires, so that we simply die. We put these things to death to get something greater. We put old things to death not to die, but so that we can live.

That's a very biblical principle. Shortly before Jesus' death, he said this in John 12:24-26:

<sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. <sup>25</sup> Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. <sup>26</sup> If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.

Of course, Jesus was talking about his own death. He needed to die before fruit was produced. But that's a general principle in life: Some things have to die before we can produce good fruit. If you want to be healthier, your bad diet has to die. If you want to be freed from an addiction, an old lifestyle has to die. If you want to have a better marriage, anger and pride and selfishness have to die. We often find ourselves having to die in order to live.

That's really the choice before all humanity. All of us will die. That's a guarantee. We don't get a choice in the matter. The question is, Will we die to ourselves before our physical death so that we can live forever, or will we stubbornly cling to this life now and die forever? The question is, Will we choose to put aside our sense of freedom and selfishness and autonomy

now, and find eternal life in Jesus, or will we live for ourselves now and be cut off from anything good forever and thus have eternal death? Those are the options. When presented that way, it's foolish not to put our old selves to death now so that we can have something better, something that is eternal, something that will last.

That's really what Christianity is about: putting to death the old so that we can have something new. It's never easy and comfortable, but it's better. Jesus went through the greatest suffering so that he could have something better. He went through pain and death to have exaltation and glory. The same can be true of us.

Now, before I close, I want to talk about how this relates to the life of our church. As many of you know, I sent out a letter the other day stating that we need to make changes in order to reach younger generations. If we don't, this church will die. It's only a matter of time. What that means is that we have to put to death our traditions, and our own little church culture in order to be more aligned with what the Bible teaches and in order to do what God wants us to do, which is to make disciples. There are ways that we can grow more biblical, particular in the way the church is governed and the way we make disciples and think about evangelism. And there are ways that we have to exchange old traditions, which might have made sense several decades ago, in order to make disciples in the here and now. As I expressed clearly in my letter, there are things we cannot change, like the nature and character of God, the Bible, and the basic functions and mission of a church. But there are ways that we can make changes, like doing away with unbiblical traditions and making sure that we make stylistic changes in order to communicate to younger people.

I have suggest we change the name of the church for a variety of reasons. I think we need to continue to change our music, which might be uncomfortable for us. Such changes may feel painful, but I don't want to make them to make this church worse. And I don't believe in making changes just for the sake of change. I think these changes need to be made in order to inject new life into the church.

The question for us is, Are we going to let some things die in order to have new life? Or are we going to cling to our old ways and experience the death of the church? Honestly, that's the real issue before us. Change can be painful. It may even feel like things are dying. But unless some things die, there won't be new life on the other end. We can choose to put to death the

things of the past now in order to bring new life to the church, or we can cling to nostalgia and the past and let the church die out within a few years. That's the choice that's before us.

I didn't come to give this church a funeral. I came here because I believe that our God is a God of resurrection. He can bring life where there is death. He can bring hope where there is despair. Jesus' disciples must have lost all hope when Jesus died on the cross. They must have felt crushed. But they saw the risen Lord with their own eyes. They heard his voice. They touched him and knew that he had risen indeed. Jesus' resurrection promises that all his people will be raised from the dead. If you're a Christian here today, that should give you great hope for the future. The power that raised Jesus from the dead is at work in all Christians, to bring them to life. And God's resurrecting power can bring new life to this church, too. As Paul says in Romans 8:11, "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."