

A Future that Changes Everything

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Even though I was born in the 70s, all my childhood memories are of the 80s. And being a kid in the 1980s was absolutely the best. I remember the ice cream man making a weekly stop in our neighborhood; I sported a Members Only jacket when I was 10. I pegged my jeans and wore socks to my knees; it was great. Something else that was great about the 80s is that I grew up watching the greatest movies of all time. I mean, seriously. *Goonies*. *Ghostbusters*. All you children of the 80s, what were your favorites?

Back to the Future is still a favorite of mine. There's a storyline in *Back to the Future* that plays a critical role in the sequels that I want to remind you of. Do you remember when Biff (PIC) gets a hold of a sports almanac that Marty purchased in 1955 to bring back to the future to cash in by making all kinds of bets on sporting events? Biff makes all the bets that Marty was wanting to make, strikes it rich, and creates an alternate future that Marty has to fix in the sequels.

What would you do if you knew the future? If you knew what the future was going to hold; if you were certain something was going to take place, how would you live? Maybe you think Biff's idea was pretty good and that's what you'd do. Well, just go back and watch *Back to the Future* and you'll be reminded it's wasn't such a fool-proof plan. Or maybe you'd make sure you would say goodbye to someone you loved before they passed away. Maybe you'd try to be a better parent. If only we knew the future we could make sure to make the right decisions in life.

There's a passage in the Bible that actually tells us not only what's going to happen in the future, but also what you should do about it. Did you know that? That's one of the cool things about God and his Word; God actually tells us what's going to happen and what we should do. Let me show you one of those places (unless, of course, you don't want to know the future.) Grab a Bible and turn to 2 Corinthians 4 (READ vs. 13-15).

What we just read was written by a man named Paul. Paul was an apostle of Jesus. The word apostle means messenger; he was a messenger of Jesus, or probably better stated an appointed messenger of Jesus. And we're catching Paul right in the middle of a letter he's writing to the church in Corinth and he's telling them how he has given everything to be a messenger of Jesus; how he's worked, sacrificed, and suffered to tell as many people as possible about what God has provided them through Jesus Christ. And this suffering taught him something very important. It taught him that he was a pretty fragile dude. He said just a few verses earlier that he was like a jar of clay, a brittle pot that is easily cracked and broken. But the work is worth it, Paul says.

That opening verse we just read, vs. 13, is a little clumsy, but what he's saying is this: He's saying, "I'm so convinced of what I believe, I'm so persuaded that it's true, that I'm going to keep on saying it." Have you ever been so convinced of something, have you ever believed something

so significantly that you were willing to stand straight and tell people what you believed? Now, you gotta know this: what he was so convinced of, what he believed so passionately, was the reason for all the suffering. Not everybody liked the message that Paul was delivering; that's where all this pain and suffering came from. But he couldn't stop.

You know you are living with integrity when you don't shrink from saying what you believe. Now, obviously, sometimes it's not the time or the place to say what you believe. And you can say what you believe in a really ugly, intrusive, and inconsiderate manner. But you're living life well when you have the inner strength and courage to say what ought to be said in a kind, thoughtful way even when it's unpopular. And Paul's there; and I want to get there.

Paul said, "I believed, so I spoke." I'm not going to stop speaking even though the message I'm sharing is getting me into all kinds of trouble. Now, you have to ask: why would Paul keep speaking then? What compelled him to live so boldly with so much conviction? I mean, I want to live like that; I want to have the kind of passion that keeps me bold about my convictions even in the face of obstacles. Vs. 14 tells us the answer.

Look at the very first word. *Knowing!* Paul knows something! And what Paul knows, what he's certain of changes the kind of life he lives; it changes the kind of person he is. That's what will happen to you, too, friends. When we know great things (or maybe I should say, "when great things grab us") our lives are changed. When we are given the vision, when we are given the revelation of the Truth, it changes the trajectory of our lives.

So, what does Paul know? Vs. 14 says, "knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence." Here's our Easter connection. We circle Easter on our calendars to remember and celebrate the truth, the reality, the factual event (I'm trying to make sure you know this isn't some fairy tale) of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. That's why Easter is so important to us who have faith in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. I know it's really easy to get distracted from the groundbreaking, life-changing reality of Easter with all the bunnies and chocolate and jelly beans. But what we remember this holiday is infinitely more important and valuable than candy and Easter egg hunts. The God of the universe proved he is real, he proved all of his promises are guarantees by raising Jesus Christ from the dead.

If you were with us for Good Friday, we all remembered together how God worked forgiveness, how God worked rescue for us through the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. All of creation, including you and me, are under the curse of God because of our sin. But Galatians 3 tells us that Jesus became a curse for us by dying on a cross so our sins could be covered by the mercy of God.

The story of Jesus' death is found in the gospels. It's remarkable how detailed they are. There is no question about it: Jesus died a gruesome, unjust death. But according to the Bible, it was part of the plan of God to save the world. Jesus became our substitute; he died in our place

for our sin. And as we read in the scriptures, Jesus died and was buried on a Friday. And then on a Sunday morning, when Jesus' faithful followers and friends, Mary Magdalene, Joanna and some other women went to pay his tomb a visit they discovered it was empty. Jesus wasn't in the tomb; instead, he was alive. He was resurrected from the dead unto new life with a new and improved, supernatural body just Jesus had promised. This event is the focal point of the Christian faith. This is why some of us call ourselves Jesus-followers, Christians. It's because God has proven himself to be strong, powerful, truthful, and gracious by raising Jesus Christ from the dead just like he said he would.

That's the information about Easter; that's the Easter connection. But let's consider what Paul is saying again. Paul basically is saying he knows two things that compel the admirable life of sacrificing himself for the good of others. The first thing Paul knows is that Jesus Christ, God the Son, was resurrected by God the Father. That's a rather remarkable thing to say he knows, don't you think? Why does Paul say he knows this? Let me give you 3 reasons why he says he knows this.

First of all, Paul saw the resurrected Jesus with his own two eyes. You can read about the time when Jesus after he was resurrected appeared to Paul. Paul saw him for himself and it changed his life. Now, you might think, "Wait a minute, Brian! Some guy says he saw a resurrected man and you're going to believe him! Are you that gullible?" I get what you're saying and I even agree with you; if it's just Paul then it's not too convincing.

Secondly, we're given a list of people who saw the resurrected Jesus, too, in 1 Corinthians 15. This is worth seeing for yourself so keep your finger in 2 Corinthians 4 and flip to 1 Corinthians 15. Look at this list in vs. 3-8 (READ). Notice just a couple of things from this list: 1) Notice the number of people. There isn't just a person or two that saw the resurrected Jesus; hundreds of people did, many of them at the same time. 2) Did you catch how Paul said in vs. 6, "many of whom are still alive." Do you know what he's getting at there? He saying, "Go ask them. They're around. If you don't believe me maybe you'll believe them?"

The last piece of evidence I want to draw your attention to is the women. Do you remember how I mentioned a few minutes ago that the women were the first to see the resurrected Jesus? That's pretty significant and here's why. In first-century in Israel, a woman's testimony was not even admissible in a court proceeding; it sadly wasn't regarded very highly. But here we have the gospel accounts citing these faithful women as the first eye-witnesses of the resurrected Jesus. Why? Why would the early church make this a part of their story, especially if they were trying to make it up? It's because it's how it really happened, that's why. Jesus first appeared to the women who so faithfully supported his work. And rather than being bashful or embarrassed about it, the early church celebrated that and said, "That's how it happened and that's how we're going to report it." Paul knew that Jesus was raised from the dead.

But do you know what else Paul *knows* from 2 Corinthians 4? He *knows* that the God who raised Jesus will also raise him. Do you see that? That's actually the main point Paul is making.

Listen again to that phrase in vs. 14 - knowing that he who raised the Lord Jesus *will raise us also with Jesus and bring us with you into his presence.*

That's your future, friends. Like Jesus you will be resurrected after your death, too. There are a ton of unknowns about death. It's why death is so mysterious; it's why so many fear death. What's going to happen to us? Where will we go? Will it be pleasant or terrible? Well, while there are still a bunch of unknowns, what matters most God is telling us right now: in the future you will be resurrected from the dead.

But here's the deal, there are two kinds of resurrections. There is the kind that will be wonderful; there will be the kind that's glorious. But there's also another kind that won't be. Listen to this passage and notice how each kind of resurrection is described. Dan. 12:2 says, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." Did you catch that? Everyone wakes up, which is a reference to the resurrection from the dead; we see this taught other places in God's word, too. But not everyone's fate and destiny is the same. Some will be resurrected for life and others for judgment.

So, how do we get the one that sounds good? How do we get the one that leads to life and not death? Listen to the words found in John 3:36, "Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him." Do you see? Do you believe in Jesus or not? Do you have hope in the risen Christ or not? That's how we get the resurrected life.

Now, you need to understand, this belief in Jesus is not your garden-variety belief. It's not like believing $2+2=4$... Yeah, yeah, I believe in Jesus and so now and I'm going to on my merry way. No, I'm talking about belief with a capital B. I'm talking about a kind of belief that grips you more than you gripping or knowing some random facts about God. True, authentic faith grabs ahold of us and doesn't let go and takes us places we'd never go on our own. True faith makes you look... oh, a little radical, I suppose. Let me see if I can give you an example. When I moved to Wisconsin, I knew we were moving into Packer country; I wasn't surprised by that. But I didn't realize so many would have the same passion for the Brewers. That took me by surprise. What I've also learned is that the same doubt and despondency Cub fans had started creeping north into Wisconsin. Year after year as I listen to my sports radio, I hear Bill Michaels and friends get their hopes up for the Brewers and then have that hope come crashing down. You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

But maybe this is the year; maybe some of you *believe* 2018 is the year the Brewers channel their inner Robin Yount and win the World Series. Do you believe this? Or let me ask it this way: Do you believe it so much that you're willing to buy your World Series tickets today? Do you believe it so deeply that you're going to take a trip to Vegas and put your life savings on the Brewers in 2018? Ah, maybe not that much.

But real faith in Jesus goes all in. Real faith in Jesus says, “Jesus really is my Lord, so I will do what he say. Jesus really is my Savior so I know my sins are forgiven. Jesus’ way really is the best so I will live my life the way he leads.” Real faith isn’t some head knowledge that doesn’t change your life; real faith grabs a hold of you and you go all in.

If you’ve never said yes to Jesus, that’s what it looks like. It looks like going all in. It’s seeing and admitting that you really need to change the direction of your life; that your sin really is your biggest problem. And it’s also seeing that Jesus really is your answer and he’s come to save you. It’s saying, “I’m ready to give my life to Jesus.” Now, you’re not going to be perfect (that’s why you need Jesus); you’re going to make mistakes (I, sadly, make them all the time). But when you turn to Jesus and make him the trajectory of your life, God changes you over time. If you’re ready to make that change, if you’re ready to say yes to Jesus, I want to help you with that. Please let me know.

Now, I need to share with you one more thing. If you’ve already said yes to Jesus, maybe you’re scratching your head a tad wondering, “But how does the resurrection change my life, Brian? You said earlier that knowing your future changes your today; how so?” Here’s how so. Knowing you will be resurrected and your future is hidden with God in Christ Jesus will give you confidence to spend your life for Jesus today. You don’t have to hold back; you can give it your all. That’s what Paul is saying in 2 Cor. 4; he saying, “I’ve giving my calling my all; I’m not holding back even though I’m a fragile, vulnerable jar of clay because I will be resurrected some day and I will be brought into the presence of Jesus. I don’t have to try and preserve my own life; I don’t have to guard it or protect it. I can spend my life for Jesus; I can give myself to the great cause of God even if it costs me my life. Why? Because I’ll live again; because I’ll be brought into Jesus’ presence. Because nothing, not even death, can rob me of my greatest treasure, which is knowing the God of the universe through Jesus Christ.”

Let the resurrection of Jesus inspire you and encourage you to give all of your life to Jesus. You won’t lose anything. I know that’s not what the world will tell you; I know everyone will tell you giving your life to Jesus will cost you everything. Well, only everything on earth (saying yes to Jesus means saying no to everything else). But nothing on earth will last forever; that’s not what’s in your future no matter what decision you make today. Eternity is your future so live for that and you will not be disappointed.

Key vs. 2 Cor. 4:13-14

Questions for the Week

- Do you believe *that* Jesus was resurrected from the dead? If not, what are you struggling to believe?
- Would you say you live life differently because Jesus was resurrected? If not, why not? Would you be willing to talk more about that with someone?
- What’s one change God is calling you to make today?