

Good afternoon! Happy Easter! We want to extend a warm welcome to our Easter service here at Clay County First Church Of God to all of you who are either with us here in person or are watching online by way of Facebook.

Let me take a moment right here at the beginning of the service to let you know that Jesus Christ is STILL alive and well! I realize we live in a world filled with challenges, and many of them may not seem to have an answer at this moment. Yet, we believe with all our hearts that not only is there “an” answer, but Jesus is THE answer for all of the things you may be facing.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, we come before you today to celebrate your resurrection. We ask that you touch those that are here today, Lord. Touch those who may be watching by way of the internet. We ask that you touch those that were given in prayer today, Lord. Touch their bodies and free them from whatever they may be dealing with. Who is there we can turn to when we need healing? Who can roll away the stone and reveal the empty tomb? No-one but you, Jesus, no-one but you! Bless this service today Lord.

Matthew 28:1-6

In the end of the sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, came Mary Magdalene and the other Mary to see the sepulchre.² And, behold, there was a great earthquake: for the angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat upon it.³ His countenance was like lightning, and his raiment white as snow:⁴ And for fear of him the keepers did shake, and became as dead men.⁵ And the angel answered and said unto the women, Fear not ye: for I know

that ye seek Jesus, which was crucified.⁶ He is not here: for he is risen, as he said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay.

Easter can make a difference in your life if you trust, follow, and have a relationship with Jesus Christ.

I want to ask two questions: **Easter—what does it mean and why does it matter?**

1. A lot of people say, "I believe in the resurrection; I just don't understand it."

In a poll that was conducted, 84 percent of people who never go to church believe Jesus rose from the dead. It is a historical fact; it wasn't done in secret.

A. The whole city of Jerusalem and the entire Roman Empire knew about it.

B. It was news. If CNN or Fox News had been there, they would have broadcast it live.

C. There are at least 15 historical references to Jesus meeting people, touching people, and talking with people after he had been crucified.

D. He cooked breakfast for some people. He healed people. He literally talked to people *after* he had risen from the dead. He was seen by thousands of people for 40 days after he had risen from the dead.

But what does his resurrection mean?

It means three things:

- (1) Jesus is who he claimed to be;
- (2) Jesus has the power he claimed to have; and
- (3) Jesus did what he promised to do.

The resurrection means Jesus is who he claimed to be.

John 11:25 says, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:"

Jesus made some outrageous claims when he was here on earth.

A. He said things like, "I'm God. I'm perfect.

B. I'm the only way to heaven. I'm the savior of the world."

A lot of people try to make Jesus just a good teacher, but a good teacher would never say that.

I could teach you good moral truths, and you might say, "David's a good teacher." But if I started calling myself God, you wouldn't think I was a good teacher anymore.

Jesus was either who he said he was, or he was the biggest liar who ever lived.

One day Jesus cleared the moneychangers out of the temple. They had turned the temple into something like the Flea Market in London, so he drove them all out.

They said, "What right do you have to do this?" He said, "Because I'm God." They said, "Prove it!" He said, "I will.

Three days after you kill me, I'm going to come back to life." He claimed to be God, and his resurrection backs up what he claimed to be.

John 14:6 says: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."

That's a strong claim. He said, "I'm *the* way."

- A. He didn't say, I'm one way, I'm a good way, or I'm one of the ways.
- B. Saying "all roads get to heaven" doesn't make sense.
- C. That's like saying I can dial any phone number and get home.

There's only one number that will get me home.

- A. Jesus said, "I am *the* truth." That means any other way is not the truth.
- B. He claimed to be God.
- C. He said, "No one can get to God the Father except by me."

Even if you don't believe Jesus Christ is who he said he was, you still use him as a reference point.

God came to earth in the form of a man so we could know what God is like.

- A. His name was Jesus Christ.
- B. He split all of history into B.C. and A.D.
- C. So every time you write a date, Jesus is the reference point.
- D. He is who he claimed to be.

The resurrection means Jesus has the power he claimed to have.

Jesus said, "All power on earth and in heaven is given to me." Because he is God, he can do everything God can do.

In John 10:18 he says: "Nobody takes my life from me. I have the power to lay it down, and I have the power to take it up again."

No force could keep Jesus in the tomb.

- A. The Romans killed him
- B. put him in a tomb,
- C. put a big stone in front,
- D. sealed it with the Roman seal,
- E. and posted a 24-hour guard.

They were only trying to prevent the inevitable.

A. Jesus said: They can't stop me.

B. I can give my life away, and I can take it up again.

Maybe that's where they get the phrase, "you can't keep a good man down"!

The resurrection means Jesus did what he promised to do.

In Mark 10:34 the bible says: **"they shall mock him, and shall scourge him, and shall spit upon him, and shall kill him: and the third day he shall rise again."**

The cross was no surprise to Jesus. It was all part of God's plan.

When you think about it, there's even humor in the Easter story.

A. I mean, how would you feel if you had been one of the men who put Jesus to death?

B. You publicly execute this man in front of thousands of witnesses who see him die,

C. Then you have him buried, a stone put over his tomb, and a 24-hour guard.

D. Three days later this guy's up and walking around the city again.

E. That deserves a hand clap of praise.

The angel said: "Don't be frightened. I know you're looking for Jesus, who was crucified."

A. But he isn't here.

B. He's come back to life again, just as he said he would."

D. He did what he promised.

When God makes a promise, you can count on it.

A. That's what Easter means.

B. Because Jesus did rise, he is who he said he was, he has the power he said he had, and he keeps the promises he makes.

So what? Why does the resurrection matter? What difference does it make?

It matters for three reasons.

- A. Because Jesus is who he claimed to be,
- B. has the power he claimed to have,
- C. and does what he promises to do.

The resurrection matters because my past can be forgiven.

That's good news. Have you ever been halfway through a project and wished you could **start over**? A lot of times people feel that way about life. They get halfway through life and wish they could start over. We have all **done things** we wish we hadn't done, **said things** we wish we hadn't said, and **thought things** we wish we hadn't thought. We all have regrets. We all feel bad about things. **We all have guilt.**

Illustration: There was a rerun of a show the other night. There was a cop and a bad guy. When the cop figured it all out and pulled the trap, the bad guy said, "I'm glad I don't have to pretend anymore. The guilt was killing me."

Illustration: A fellow pastor received this letter: "I'm 31 years old and divorced, though I fought the divorce bitterly. I feel bad. I have no hope for my future. Often I go home and cry, but there's no one holding me when I cry. Nobody

cares. Nothing changes, and I continue to fail. I'm stressed out emotionally, and I feel like I'm on the verge of a collapse. Something is very wrong. But I feel so hurt and bitter that I can scarcely react or relate to others anymore. I feel as if I'm going to have to sit out the rest of my life on the sidelines."

The sad thing is, I know a lot of people like that.

A. They can't get on with the present and the future because they're stuck in the past.

B. Some guilt or regret has tied them down.

C. Sometimes they're letting a former relationship mess up their current relationship.

D. They say, "I guess I'll just have to live with this the rest of my life."

E. They're running around with this emotional stuff, and they're wondering why they're not happy.

Here's the good news. **Colossians 2:14 says: "He has forgiven all our sins and canceled every debt we owe. Christ has done away with it by nailing it to the cross."**

This is God's pardon program.

- A. Jesus nailed it all to the cross.
- B. He paid for my guilt.
- C. That means I don't have to pay for it.
- D. He was hung on a cross for my hang-ups.

Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross, so I can quit nailing myself to the cross.

- A. He wants to forgive your past.
- B. He wants to cancel every debt you owe—
- C. emotional debts, relational debts, sins. All canceled.

How long do you remember a bill that's been paid?

- A. I don't remember it at all. Once it's paid, I forget it.
- B. The point is this: Once God's forgiven it, I can forget it.
- C. That's good news! Even if there was no such thing as heaven or hell
—and there is—
- D. it would be worth becoming a Christian just to have a clear conscience;
- E. just to know I am free from all those things I've done wrong.
- F. Because Jesus is who he said he was, my past can be forgiven.

G. I don't have to carry a load of guilt around. It's unnecessary.

Notice this verse: **Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus."**

Illustration: For those of you who are here, do you know or remember what an Etch-A-Sketch is? What happens if you mess up the picture? You flip it, shake it, turn it back over, and there's a clean slate. This is God's Etch-A-Sketch verse in the Bible. He wants to wipe our slates clean.

Friends, you can walk out of here today, knowing that every single thing you've ever done wrong until this point is completely forgiven.

- A. That's good news.
- B. That's news I can use.
- C. No condemnation!
- D. Friends, Jesus Christ did not come to rub it in; he came to rub it out.
- E. He said: "I didn't come to condemn the world; I came to save it.
- F. I want to change you, I want to help you, I want to give you a new beginning,
- G. I want to give you a clear conscience."

The resurrection matters because my present problems can be managed.

Illustration: Much of life is unmanageable. I was reading about an author. He wrote: "Before we had kids, I used to travel across the country teaching a lecture I called 'The Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Kids.'" After he and his wife had their first child, he changed the title to "Ten Hints for Parents." After their second child, he relabeled the lecture, "A Few Tentative

Suggestions for Fellow Strugglers." He said after the arrival of their third child, he gave up speaking on the topic altogether.

Maturity is when you figure out you can't have it all figured out.

A. Maturity is when you realize you can't manage all life is going to send you.

B. But God can.

C. And that's good news.

D. I can't control everything in my life, but God can.

E. So I want to hook up with him and let him control it and ask him for help.

I talk to lots of people, and the number one complaint I hear from people today is this:

- A. "My life is out of control." I hear it a thousand times:
- B. "I feel powerless to change the situation.
- C. I feel powerless to break a bad habit.
- D. I feel powerless to save a relationship.
- E. I feel powerless to get out of debt.
- F. I feel powerless to manage my time and my schedule.

What you need is a power greater than yourself.

- A. You were never meant to live this life on your own power.
- B. God wants to have a relationship with you.
- C. And here's the good news: **Ephesians 1:19-20 says:**
"How incredibly great is his power to help those who believe him, the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead."

The same power that enabled Jesus to rise from death will help you rise above your problems.

The same power God used at the resurrection 2,000 years ago can be used in your life right now.

You don't know what the future holds. I don't either.

I don't know what's going to happen next year, next month, or next week.

I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, and neither do you.

But it doesn't matter,

A. because even though it's out of my control, it's not out of God's.

B. He will give me the power to face it.

Philippians 4:13 says: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

I want to help out, God says.

Some of you came in here today; You've had a tough week.

A. God wants to say this to you: Don't give up. Don't give up.

No problem is too big for God. No situation is hopeless if you'll turn it over to him.

A. "I am ready for anything through the power of positive thinking"? No, it doesn't say that.

B. "I am ready for anything because I psyched myself up"? No.

C. "I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ, who lives in me."

Why does the resurrection matter? Because my past can be forgiven, my present can be managed, and:

The resurrection matters because my future can be secure.

One of the universal problems we've all got is death.

A. Let's face it—everybody dies.

B. I'm going to die someday, and so are you.

C. Only a fool would go all through life unprepared for something he knows is inevitable.

D. That doesn't make sense.

E. But sometimes we get so busy in the here and now, we don't stop to think about what's going to come.

People don't like to talk about death. If you don't believe me, invite your friends over, sit them down, serve them some coffee and pie, and say, "Let's talk about death." See what happens.

Illustration: I heard they asked some children to write sentences about what they believed about death.

A. One child, aged 8, said, "When you die they put you in a box and bury you in the ground because you don't look too good."

B. Another child, aged 9, said, "Doctors help you so you won't die until you pay their bill."

C. Another child, aged 9, said, "When you die, you don't have to do homework in heaven unless your teacher is there too."

D. And another child, aged 10, said, "A good doctor can help you so you won't die. A bad doctor sends you to heaven."

The fact is everybody has a deep internal longing to know,

A. "What's going to happen after I die?"

It's obvious we're going to spend more time on that side of eternity than on this side.

Here we only spend 60, 70, maybe 80 years. This is just the first inch of the yardstick.

This is preschool for what's going to happen in eternity.

It is interesting to me that as 78 million people move into middle age,

A. All of a sudden they're becoming more interested in the hereafter.

Illustration: A popular news magazine ran a cover article called, "The Rekindling of Hell."

A. It says more people believe in heaven and hell than ever before in American history.

B. Why? Because people are wondering, "What's going to happen?"

There are a lot of misconceptions about heaven.

A. Most of them come from movies with bad theology: *Heaven Can Wait*; *Oh, God*; *All Dogs Go To Heaven*.

B. These are cute little ideas of what somebody thinks heaven is going to be like.

What is it really going to be like? Let's check it out with the source. When you go to the Bible, what does God say it's really going to be like in heaven and hell?

Now listen. This is news you can use. This is essential, because one day you're going to stand before God, and you're going to need to know the right answers.

Number one, heaven is a perfect place. Total love, total peace, total joy, total perfection. No sin, no mistakes, no evil, no bad, no errors. It's perfect in every area.

The second thing the Bible says is that in order for you to go there, you have to be perfect, because only perfection can exist in heaven. You say, "Oh. Well thanks a lot. That leaves me out." Yeah, it leaves me out, too. You say, "I'll never make it if I have to be perfect." Right! That's the point. Neither will I. Neither will any of us, because none of us is perfect; we've all messed up.

Romans 3:10 says "There is none righteous, no, not one."

There are two ways the Bible says you can get to heaven. Plan A is to earn it.

A. That's the performance plan. And to earn it you only have to do this:

B. never sin and always do what's right for the entire time that you live.

C. Always make the right decision,

D. always say the right thing,

E. never say the wrong thing. Just be perfect.

Illustration: It would be as if they changed the rules of the Baseball Hall of Fame and said in order to get in you had to bat 1,000 and play error-free ball your entire career. Even the best get 300.

Since none of us qualify for Plan A, God came up with Plan B, which is this:

A. You trust Jesus Christ when he says, "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

B. He was the only perfect person who ever lived, because he was God.

C. He came so we could know what God is like.

D. And by trusting and establishing a relationship with him, you get in on his goodness.

Illustration: I read about a man who took his young son to a carnival one time for his birthday. His son picked six boys to go with him, so this man bought a roll of tickets.

Every line he'd come up to, he'd pull off seven tickets and give them to all the kids. When they got to the Ferris wheel, all of a sudden there was this eighth little kid with his hand out.

The man said, "Who are you?" The kid said, "I'm Johnny." The man said, "Who are you, Johnny?" Johnny said, "I'm your son's new friend. And he said you would give me a ticket." So the man said, "Do you think I gave him one? Absolutely."

When you get to heaven you'll say, "God, I can't get in on my own effort."

A. The only way I can get into heaven is because I'm a friend of Jesus Christ."

B. John 17:3 says: "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."

That's what the Bible says. Jesus has already paid for your way to heaven.

A. This is news you can use.

B. A Christian is not somebody who accepts a religion.

C. A Christian is somebody who has a relationship with God.

A lot of people try different ways to get to heaven.

- A. Some people try what I call "salvation by sincerity." It goes like this:
- B. "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere."
- C. Yeah? Just think that one through. You can be sincerely wrong.

I read the other day about a pilot who sincerely flew into a mountain.

- A. He thought it was lower.
- B. He killed himself. He was sincerely wrong.

I could pick up a glass of water and take a drink of it,

- A. sincerely thinking it's water,
- B. but if it's poisoned, I'd be sincerely dead.

Some people think you get to heaven by service: "I can do all these good things and work my way there." That doesn't work.

Some people try "salvation by subtraction."

- A. You give up a bunch of things and then you get to heaven:
- B. "I don't drink, smoke, cuss, chew, run around with girls that do.
- C. I don't do nothin'.
- D. "If being a Christian is just a matter of not doing things,
- E. then anybody who's dead qualifies as a Christian."

Then there are people who think they'll get to heaven by ritual:

A. "I'll get baptized."

I. You can get baptized in the ocean until every fish knows you by your first name.

II. Maybe you'll join a church and think that will make you a Christian.

Sitting in a church will make you a Christian as much as sitting in a chicken house will make you a chicken.

You say you joined the church. Would joining the Lion's Club make you a lion?

You say you were born in the church. If you were born in the car does that make you a spare tire? Think it through! Use your mind!

How about "salvation by heritage."

A. Your mother was a Christian. Your grandmother was a Christian. So what?

B. You have to make a personal decision yourself.

C. That's like saying you're married because your mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother were married.

D. No, you've got to make a personal decision.

And then my favorite of all—"salvation by comparison":

A. "At least I'm better than so-and-so."

B. You're probably better than me. I don't doubt it.

C. But the fact is, God isn't judging you according to me or anybody else.

D. Saying, "I'm better than Hitler" is like saying, "I can bench press more than my grandmother."

E. God doesn't grade on a curve.

F. It's either perfection or zip! It's either 100 percent or Plan B: trust Christ.

What's your source of hope? Hope means confidence in the Bible.

Look at **1 Peter 1:3: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,"**

Hope means you don't fear death anymore.

- A. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die.
- B. You can't really live unless you're not afraid to die.
- C. How can you not be afraid to die? By making peace with God *now*.

Would you like to have everything you've ever done wrong completely forgiven? Would you like to have a clear conscience?

Number two, would you like to acquire a new power that would help you manage the problems in your present?

And number three, would you like to have your future secured?

That's the difference Easter can make.

- A. Understanding why Easter happened—
- B. why Christ rose from the dead—is not enough. You've got to do something about it.
- C. You've got to take some action steps.

Understanding what I've just talked about is not enough to get you into heaven.

- A. You've got to accept it and act on it.
- B. You need to say to God, "God, I'm scrapping Plan A.
- C. I know I'll never earn my way to heaven.
- D. I know I can never be good enough.
- E. I've already blown it enough times to know I'm not going to make the 100 percent thing. So I'm asking you to work Plan B in my life.
- F. Jesus Christ, I want to trust you, follow you, get to know you and have a relationship."
- G. That's how you do it. **That's how Easter can make a difference in your life.**

All of us came today for different reasons.

- A. Some of you came because it's the traditional thing to do.
- B. Others of you came because a friend invited you, somebody who really cares about you.
- C. Some of you came because maybe you saw us on Facebook.
- D. It doesn't matter why you think you came here. You're not here by accident.
- E. God brought you here. He brought you here so he could communicate with you;
- F. so he could get you to sit still for 15 minutes so he could say something to you.

This is what God wants to say to you today: "You matter to me.

I understand everything about your life. I know you. I made you, remember?

I want to have a relationship with you. I sent my son to die for you.

I want you to get to know me."

Your background may be Catholic or Jewish, Pentecostal or Holiness or Baptist.

- A. I don't care what your background is. I'm not talking about religion.
- B. I'm talking about a relationship with Jesus Christ.

That's what Easter is about. God knows you. He wants you to know him.

So you come with an open heart and say, "God, here I am."

Some of you have been close to God in the past. You've drifted away. What does God say to somebody who has drifted away? **Isaiah 54:7 says: "With deep love, I will welcome you back."**

Nobody will ever love you as much as Jesus Christ does. Nobody.

You matter to God, and he brought you here today to tell you that.

Jesus Christ died for you to prove how much he loves you.

We're all at different levels in our journey. Some of you aren't sure you're going to heaven when you die. You need to make sure. Some of you need to recommit your life to the Lord.

ALTAR CALL

Right now I ask that everyone stand. I want everyone to stand, and close your eyes.

Nobody's going to single you out or make you raise your hand, so you can relax.

Maybe you're not sure you'd go to heaven if you died.

I want you to understand today why we need salvation, how God provided salvation, how we can receive salvation, and what are the results of salvation. Today I want to teach you what the road to salvation looks like...

Romans 3:23, “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.” We have all sinned. We have all done things that are displeasing to God. There is no one who is innocent.

Romans 6:23a, teaches us about the consequences of sin: “For the wages of sin is death.” The punishment that we have earned for our sins is death. Not just physical death, but eternal death!

Romans 6:23b: “but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Romans 5:8 declares, “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” Jesus Christ died for us! Jesus’ death paid for the price of our sins. Jesus’ resurrection proves that God accepted Jesus’ death as the payment for our sins.

Romans 10:9-10, says “⁹That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

¹⁰ For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Because of Jesus’ death on our behalf, all we have to do is believe in Him, trusting His death as the payment for our sins – and we will be saved!

Romans 10:13 says it again, “ For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.” Jesus died to pay the penalty for our sins and rescue us from eternal death. Salvation, the forgiveness of sins, is available to anyone who will trust in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

Maybe others of you have drifted away from Christ. God wants to say to you, "With deep love I will draw you back." Would you say, "Jesus, I'm coming home today. I want to get it in gear again. I want to quit playing Mickey Mouse and put first things first in my life."

I ask that you pray something like this in your heart: "Jesus, I'm not sure if I'm saved or not. I'm asking you to save me today. I'm putting my total trust in you, and I want to follow you. Thank you for loving me and dying for me. Help me to understand it more."

Some of you have not found a church home. Clay County First Church of God would love to be your spiritual family. We welcome you here. This is a place for imperfect people. The purpose of our church is to teach people how to live, and to prepare people for when they die. Those are two things you need. We'd love to have you here.

Finally, I'm sure some of you are barely hanging on; you've been discouraged, depressed, down-hearted. The pressure and stress has

been building up this past week or this past month, and you feel overwhelmed. God brought you here today so he could say to you, "Give it all to me. Let go and let me work in your life." Would you say, "Jesus, I want to give you these problems I'm facing. I want to give you my life—the good, the bad, the ugly. Fill me with your hope and your presence and power. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."