

## **I Am (Part 8) – The Resurrection and the Life**

Matt Chandler – March 27, 2016

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Well, good morning. Happy Easter. If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab those. We'll be in John 11. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. I know this is Easter, so everyone is here, even those of you who maybe only come a few times a year. If you don't own a Bible, that's our gift to you. If you want a nicer one (this would help us out), you can head to Connection Central after the service. We have a lost and found in there. You might even find the one you left here Christmas Eve in there.

If you want to grab those and clean it out or maybe get some Easter gifts of journals and Bibles for some of your family members or sunglasses and reader glasses in there. Anyway, we're just glad you're here. Let's grab a Bible. I want you to see that I'm not making anything up here, but we're just going to read the Bible. This actually concludes a series we've been in for the last seven weeks on the "I am" statements of Jesus in the gospel of John.

What we've said is that we wanted to get our minds around not just what Jesus has done but who he is in the belief that understanding who he is would embolden and strengthen our faith in what he says he has done on our behalf. That's what we've been doing. The statement we'll be covering today is, "I am the resurrection and the life." It's actually the fifth of the seven statements.

We reworked the order so that on Easter morning, the morning when we're celebrating the death of death and that God's complete and utter victory over sin forever, we could talk about Jesus being the resurrection and the life. Let me just lay before you the way I want to argue for the next 35 minutes. Then you can decide how much you want to be dialed in.

Here is my argument out of the text. Jesus wants to invade our present reality. However you have come into this room... I know what we have. I know some of us are very strong believers. I know some of us are infants in our faith. Others of us are here just in case there is a God one day. We want to just have this kind of on our resumes for the rest of the year. It's not really on our radar, but we

know there might be a God, so we just want to have this down. "No, no, no. I was there Easter of 2016." I know that's some of you.

Others of you are here because your crazy religious family member brought you, or that weirdo coworker of yours who is always reading their Bible and listening to weird music at their desk has brought you here. I know we're all over the map today, and that's okay, but I want to just lay before you that however you came in, I believe that Jesus wants to invade your present reality and accomplish two things.

He wants to kind of untangle your past and then take the hope you have in your future and pull it into the present. That's the argument I think we're going to see in John 11 as we talk about Jesus being the resurrection and the life, that Jesus wants to invade our present, regardless of how we've come in, regardless of who we are, and he wants to start to untangle our past and then grab our future hope and then pull it into the present. That's what I think we're going to see in this text.

John 11. We're going to start in verse 17. While you find that, let me catch you up on the narrative. Jesus is close friends with this family. If you have a background in church, you'll know of this family. It's Mary, Martha, and their brother Lazarus. The Scriptures are clear that Jesus loves this family. If you know your Bible... Again, it's fine if you don't, but if you have a church background, Mary is the one who wets Jesus' feet with her tears and washes his feet with her hair.

There is a devotion in this family, a love for Jesus in this family. That love is reciprocated by Christ. He is a fan of this family, if we could use that language. Jesus and his disciples had been doing ministry around Jerusalem. People in Jerusalem tried to kill Jesus. It was not Jesus' time to die, so Jesus and his disciples left Jerusalem and went out into the countryside and were doing ministry outside of there when Lazarus gets sick, and he gets bad sick.

Mary and Martha send a runner to Jesus to let Jesus know, "Hey, Lazarus is sick. Can you come back? Can you help us?" When Jesus receives this message that Lazarus is sick, he says. "This is not the sickness that leads to death but rather is the sickness that will glorify my Father." Already, we have a category that most of us don't like to talk about, the category of a sickness that brings glory to God.

Jesus hears that and then continues to minister for a couple of days instead of going to Bethany where Lazarus is dying. Then we read that Lazarus dies. Jesus then says, "Hey, we need to head to

Bethany." His disciples go, "Didn't they just try to kill us there?" Jesus says, "Yes. We're going back to Bethany, for our brother Lazarus has fallen asleep."

The disciples who (and this should always encourage you) are really slow to understand say, "Well, yeah, he has been sick. He should be resting," to which Jesus replied, "No, no, no. He's dead," after, I can imagine, a sigh. "No, no, no. He's dead, so we're going to go so you might see the glory of God." The disciples are still like, "We'll die with you," and they follow Jesus to what they think is their impending death. From there, we pick up the story. John 11, starting in verse 17.

**"Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house."**

Now, don't make too much of that, although this is a weird role reversal for these sisters. It's Jewish custom in the first century that upon the death of a family member, there would be a 30-day period of mourning in which you just sat in the house. What has happened here is Jesus is coming. Word has reached the sisters that Jesus is coming. Martha, who is normally the rule follower... I don't know if you have sisters or have ever been around a couple of sisters. There is usually a rule follower and a not rule follower, right? Martha is normally the rule follower.

If you'll remember later in the Scriptures, it's Mary who is at the feet of Jesus and Martha frantically doing what she thought she was supposed to do based on the rules. Throw all of that out the window because Martha the rule follower isn't following rules today. She runs out to meet Jesus, and Mary, who is usually the wild one, stays there and obeys the rules. Martha gets to Jesus, and here's what she says. She has a legitimate concern.

**"Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'**

**Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life.'" There's our "I am" statement. "'Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me**

**shall never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world.'"**

Now, I think it's important to note here, as we're talking about Jesus invading our present and kind of untangling our past and bringing the hope of the future into the present, that everything Martha does here is correct. It's just not complete. Everything she does here is correct. It's just not complete. We'll start with this. Martha does three things as she gets to Jesus.

First, she immediately brings up the past. It's the first thing out of her mouth. It's a legitimate concern. "If you had been here, my brother would not die." That may or may not be true, right? "If you would have come, he would have lived." This is the first thing out of her mouth. Listen. It's easy for us to read the Bible backward. It's really different to put yourself in this space. Let me kind of unpack this space for you.

You don't have to be an expert in first-century history or anything like that to just stop for a second and imagine what it would have been like for two sisters to try to nurse their dying brother to health while waiting on Jesus to get there, only to see Jesus no-show. There is no ICU. There is no electricity. They're trying to keep their brother alive.

I don't know if you've been around death. Death is always ugly. Dignity always goes out the window. There is a gasping for air, a trying to breathe that becomes laborious and then feels like it's impossible and then gets replaced with a gurgle until you die. Mary and Martha had watched their brother. We don't know what kind of illness this is. We get no indication that he is an old man.

You have a man who is losing his life to sickness and two sisters who try to keep him alive until Jesus can get there, and Jesus no-shows, and he dies. Martha, looking to the past, says, "If you would have been here, he would have lived." Now, there's nothing wrong with looking to the past. In fact, repeatedly, throughout the Scriptures, we're commanded for there to be remembrance in us, to remember God's faithfulness, to remember those times when God has been good and gracious, to even remember those valleys in which God has led us through those valleys.

Although Martha is doing what is correct, to remember, she's not doing it in a way I would call being complete. Let me lay this before you. I know what we're doing here. There are some of you whose past is a real hang-up on the truth of who God is and the truth of who Christ is. It's a difficult

question. I never want to shy away from the question, "How can God be loving and me have experienced what I've experienced in my past?"

For many of us, there is this thing behind us that defined us. It has become a type of identity for us, and we can't reconcile a loving God with what is behind us. One, we can't reconcile that he would love us because of what we've done, and we certainly can't reconcile him being loving when we consider what has occurred to us.

If there is any kind of abuse in your background, if there is any kind of neglect in your background, if there is any type of other darkness in your background, the question has to be in there. "Where were you? If you're good, where were you? If you're kind, where were you? If you are for me and not against me, where were you?" This is the question that prompts Martha's statement. "If you had been here, my brother would not have died."

The reason we miss that so often is because if you're a church person, you know how this story ends, but in this moment, nobody knows how this ends. People are wailing. There is mourning. There is sackcloth and ashes. Mary is still sitting in the house, where she has been for days. She refuses to come out, even for Jesus.

From there, she moves right from that, "Where were you, Jesus?" to what I'll just call a religious platitude. What we see in Martha's present state... You might think that I'm being too hard on her. I don't think I am. I'll show you a little bit later why. In verse 22, she says this. She goes, "Where were you? If you would have been here, this wouldn't have happened. You could have kept him from dying." Verse 22. **"But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you."**

Now, I'm going to argue that this is a spiritual platitude, that this is what she knows she's supposed to say, but deep down inside, she doesn't believe it. This is a type of weak-sauce, inch-deep, bumper-sticker theology that has not really emboldened her faith but has rather become just something she knows she's supposed to say.

Just so we can all feel safe together, how many of you have found there are seasons when you just have spiritual platitudes? You have these sentences that you'll just say, and the depth of those and the reality of those hasn't really nestled in your heart. Any time you see a bumper sticker, that's what that is. If you're driving past a car, and it says, "The Bread of Life never gets stale," that's what I'm talking about.

It's this, "Oh, that's cute." It happens all the time on Facebook and Instagram and Pinterest, where these little kind of spiritualized memes are there. It's true. There's nothing non-true about it, nothing untrue about it, but it's not that the person has embraced it or really submitted to the truth. Rather, "That sounds good. Let me say it."

This happens all the time, and this is where Martha finds herself. She says, "Where were you? Had you been here, my brother would not have died, but I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give to you." Then Jesus says, "Your brother will rise." Then what is Martha's response? Martha's response is to head deep into the future.

Let's look at her response in verse 24. **"Martha said to him, 'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.'"** Here we have Martha looking back on her past, "If you would have been here..." in about an inch deep of spiritual platitudes, on into, "I know that years and years and years from now, in the last days, he'll rise," deep into her future. That's where her hope lies.

Now, remember what we're talking about. We're saying that Jesus being the resurrection and the life means that the past is going to start to be untangled, and the hope of our future is going to be brought into, begin to seep into the present, however we've walked into this room today. Jesus is going to do that with a bold, difficult statement.

The statement is difficult because it removes any notion that he might merely be just a good moral teacher. It's sentences like the one we're about to read where Jesus presents himself as the solution to a problem that eradicates or removes from any of us the ability to say, "He was a great teacher," because he's not claiming to be a great teacher. He's not even teaching a lesson.

He's saying, "No, I'm the solution to the problem." Let's look at that in verse 25. She says, "I know he will rise on the last days." Jesus steps in and said to her, "No, no, no. I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." Now, that's a problem if you want to just say Jesus is a good teacher, because Jesus didn't pull her aside and say, "One day, God is going to accomplish these things." He doesn't do that. He submits himself as the solution.

"No, no, no, Martha. I am the resurrection and the life. The resurrection and life isn't some future event. It's here now, available to you, to all." Jesus is saying, "I am the solution to this problem of

broken pasts, shallow religious platitudes, and a future hope that is tens of thousands of years away." He says, "I am the resurrection. All who believe in me will not die, not the eternal death. Even though they die, they will live."

Then he goes on to say that not only is he the resurrection but that he is the life. We've talked about this quite a bit in the *I Am* series. The *I Am* series kind of drives this point that Jesus, when he invites us to follow him, is inviting us into life, the type of life that can only be experienced by those who are in Christ. That might sound offensive to you if you're not a believer. I'm not saying you cannot enjoy a thousand pleasures of God's good, common grace.

What I mean by that is anything pleasurable and good has been given to all mankind to be enjoyed, but the Christian can enjoy them in ways the non-Christian cannot. The easiest way to talk about this is food, right? You can be a sadistic, narcissistic, wicked human being and love a good steak and glass of wine, right? You do not have to be a Christian to appreciate good food. Is that right? That's completely right. A murderous, violent thug could deeply enjoy a beautiful meal.

Yet, it is those who believe in a creator God who not only enjoy the meal for what it is, good flavors, sustenance, but then gets a sense of the God who provided and the God who, in his creativity, gives them not just mush to sustain them but flavors to delight them. That's what the Christian gets that the non-Christian doesn't. You could substitute food with any other pleasure that man can experience. There is a deeper reality available for the believer than there is for the non-believer.

If you're not a believer, I'm not saying that you can't enjoy sex and marriage and food and your dog and whatever else. I'm just saying there's a deeper level of pleasure available to the believer because he or she knows who is behind it all. This is what Jesus means when he says, "I am the life." He's making this declaration that it's here available now. "I'm standing right here. This is the invasion of the present. I'm here right now."

He's going to consummate or fulfill or show out that he's the resurrection and the life just a few verses down. Let's look at this. Starting in verse 38, there is this interaction with Mary. It's not that it's not important. It's just that for time's sake, we're going to skip down to verse 38. **"Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days.'"**

This is my Easter present to you. When you get a chance a little bit later, look this text up in the King James Version of the Bible. I'm not making this up. It says the word *stinketh* there. You can check it. Don't do it now. I know you have devices. Don't do it now. Later. It really says, "It will stinketh." I just thought that was awesome. There's no time for that.

**"...there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days."** Verse 40. Such a beautiful verse.

**"Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?'"**

What does it take to see the glory of God? Belief. Now, earlier, when I said she was giving kind of religious platitudes... "Well, I know that whatever you ask for, God will do." "Okay, move this stone." "Uh, it will stinketh if you take that stone away. Jesus, you had your shot. Had you been here, this wouldn't have happened, but man, we're four days in."

There are some first-century writings that say that the Jews believed that the Spirit might hover around the body for a few days, so I think one of the pieces of significance about it being the fourth day is that no superstition could leak its way into this story. He's "dead dead" would be a good way to see this, which is why I think it refers to him as "the dead man" here in a second. He's "dead dead." He's been dead for four days. Martha, who earlier said, "Whatever you ask can happen," when Jesus says, "Move the stone," replies, "Uh, are you sure? Are you sure about that?"

Again, I always want to highlight Jesus' tenderness toward doubt. What does he say? Does he rebuke her? Does he go, "You know what? You just ruined it. I'm trying to do something nice for you, and this is what..." That's not what he does. Again, I know we're giggling a little bit. This is a significant moment. **"Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?"** What's stunning is this story continues when we have evidence that she didn't believe. Let's keep reading.

**"So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, 'Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out.' The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"**

Now, I want to complete the picture now of the past being untangled and the future hope being pulled or seeping into the present in this invasion of Christ in our present. If we can think not on the



side of the resurrection of Lazarus but on the front side of the death of Lazarus, you have two sisters who watched their brother struggle to breathe. We watched two sisters watch their vibrant brother wither away and die from some illness. It's a sudden illness. It came out of nowhere. I'm not a doctor, but if you are a doctor you can have some conversations.

If a sudden illness falls on you and kills you within a couple of weeks, it's more than likely violent, a lot of vomit, high fever, a lot of writhing, a lot of agony. His sisters saw this up close, all the while looking out the window and trying to figure out, "Where is Jesus?" The runner has already returned. "Did you tell him?" "Yeah, I told him. He said, 'This isn't the sickness that leads to death.' That's what he said. Then he started teaching again."

He writhes. He groans. The fever grows. He vomits. He can't keep fluid down. He starts to struggle to breathe. These are sights and smells that the sisters saw. Then Jesus walks into town and says, "Move the stone." Martha protests, "It's going to stinketh." The stone is moved. Here's what I mean by unraveling the past, untangling the past. For all the sisters saw, for all of their tears...

I have to imagine there were many in that house looking out the window, waiting for Jesus to show up. What do you think happens when Lazarus hops out of the tomb? What happens to all of those memories? What happens to all of that sadness? What happens to all of that heartbreak when Lazarus comes out of the tomb? Does it not vanish the moment Lazarus pops out?

All the sorrow, all the loss, all the heartbrokenness, all the doubt, all the fear, all the accusations against Christ and whether or not he actually cares and whether or not he actually loves and whether or not he actually is who he says he is vanishes when Lazarus, still wrapped in grave clothes, hops out of the tomb alive, resurrected from the dead.

Where had Martha and Mary's hopes been? In a future resurrection that was on the last day, but Jesus brought the hope of the future into the present. Now, in the present with Martha and Mary, the past is being untangled, and the present hope is entering into their present, into this new reality that is only possible because Jesus is the resurrection and the life.

Here's the big question for us. If we're honest, we have our own doubts this morning. For some of us, our doubts are tied to our past. It's just the truth. It's tied to one of two versions of the past. It's tied to the past in that we just can't believe God would actually love us. We've been guilty of some

things. Our understanding of the Christian faith is that God really has a thing for good people. He loves good folks, but people like us, it's just not for us.

We didn't grow up with Ned Flanders as a dad. Our background is not compatible with what it means to be a Christian. Yet, what we see in the Scriptures so often is that it seems that the Lord has a special delight in pulling from the fringes of darkness what will end up being his brightest lights. Some of our doubts are wrapped up in our past.

If it's not that kind of past, it can be the kind of past where this really dark moment happened to us, this really horrible thing, and we just can't reconcile that God is good and that this actually happened to us. "Where was he?" It would be just a similar question to Martha's. "Where were you? Had you been here, this wouldn't have happened."

We wrestle in that space. Yet, when Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life," when he dies on the cross and is risen from the dead, what we have before us is the opportunity for the past to begin to be untangled as the future hope begins to seep into our lives. For some of us, it's not our past that causes doubt. It's our present. Here's what I mean by that.

By our present, I mean that like Martha, we have a lot of spiritual, religious platitudes. We're about an inch deep, a type of weak-sauce, Bible-Belt Christianity that knows nothing of commitment to Christ and only of right answers around faith. There is no real commitment to Christ. There is no real desire to follow him. Again, I said it earlier, and I'll say it again. I know that some of you are here just in case there is a God. Some of you are here just in case.

Lord knows if God takes attendance, it's on this weekend. This is kind of his weekend, so this is especially the weekend he's going to check in. You didn't do that Saturday night thing. You didn't rise on Saturday night. You didn't go to that Saturday night service. Sunday morning. "I know the Bible says he rose Sunday morning. I'm going on Sunday morning. That's when roll is going to be taken." You're here not because you believe or are committed but rather he might be real, so you're here.

Now, that won't stop you from identifying as an evangelical. That won't stop you from even posting from time to time spiritual platitudes on your Facebook wall or defining yourself as a Christian despite the fact that there is no submission to the Lord, no desire to follow after him, no desire to do life with his people, no care or understanding of how he has organized and designed our world to

work and the mission he has given you. No, no, no. Just religious platitudes, just bumper-sticker theology.

For some of us, our doubts are around our future. Here's what I mean by that. The reason to doubt that Jesus is the resurrection and the life is to believe that you're on the cusp of solving everything you think is wrong. Some of us have doubts that Jesus is the resurrection and the life because we're really close to getting it all like we want it.

We just have this little thing in our marriage to work out. We just have this little thing financially to work through. We just have this little thing with one of our kids. He has a little bit of a mouth on him. We just have to solve that. Once we get all that solved, we have the money we want, the house we want, the relationships we want, and then if no one moves life is going to be awesome.

You can giggle at that, but you would be surprised at how many people, if they're honest with themselves, really believe, "I don't need the resurrection and the life because I'm almost there. I almost have it. I'm just so close. Just a couple of more things to go my way, and then I'm there." No, let me just in all humility try to lay this before you.

My guess is if you can be honest with yourself, you've been on and off that cusp for maybe over a decade. You have not quite been able to get there, and once you got there, somebody moved. Right? For some of us, it's our past. For some of us, it's our present. For others of us, it's our future. Not to mention the glaring question of, "How do we know this isn't a one-off? How do we watch the resurrection of Lazarus and think that has much, if anything, to do with us at all?"

Sure, we might be able to see ourselves in Mary and Martha. We might be able to kind of pull from this story some moral principles to apply to our lives. If we're going to really believe that Christ is the resurrection and the life and that to believe in him is to not die but to live and that eternal life starts now in the present, not when we die, how can we be confident that this Lazarus resurrection wasn't a one-off? Well, I'm glad you asked that question.

What we're celebrating here this morning is not the resurrection of Lazarus, who would die again, but rather celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ that shows us, reveals to us as Christians, that death is dead, and sin is defeated forever, and our past is now being ironed out, and the hope of the future has been pulled into the present. We're seeing this and feeling this, and the greatest evidence we have is the Spirit of God working among us.

Let me give you illustrations. When people get in our baptistery and they share what their life has been like without Christ... One of my favorite parts of The Village is the stories we hear. When people get into this water in front of 1,400 strangers and talk about their addiction, talk about their depravity, talk about horrific, shameful things they've given themselves over to, and in a moment, what was meant to be shame and guilt becomes a trophy of God's grace, that's the past starting to get untangled.

It's not that there aren't issues to work through going forward, but in that moment, when we testify, "Christ has changed by heart. God has redeemed my past." Now, all of a sudden, the past is starting to get untangled. As we begin to follow Christ in the here and now, the hope of the future starts to seep into our present. It's not wrong to have hope for the future. I can tell you this. When I read 1 Corinthians 15 about what a resurrection body is like, I'm hopeful for that thing. I'm hopeful to not get sore sleeping.

I'm hopeful to not be able to get sick, to not grow weary. Right? I'm looking forward to that. That's a part of my inheritance that is on the way. Aspects of that future hope are being realized in my life and in the life of Christians in greater and greater ways as we seek after and follow him. He slowly transforms us and gives us new affections. The things we used to love, now we don't love at all, and things we thought we never thought we could love, now we're crazy about. That's all the work of the Holy Spirit of God taking the hope of the future and beginning to fill it into our now.

I have found that many men and women feel like life is hollow and thin, and usually when someone thinks their life is hollow and thin they're making one of two errors. They're looking back on their past and going, "Oh, I wish something would have gone differently back here," or they're looking toward their future and going, "Today really stinks, but in the future, if I could just line these things up, if I could just work a little bit harder, if I could just get these things to go my way, then finally..." When you're stuck in the past or stuck in the future, you hollow out the now. You thin out the now.

What Jesus tells Martha is, "No, no, no. I am the way. I am the resurrection and the life *now*. Believe in me *now*. You will not die. Believe in me *now*, and you will live." Really, the offer on the table for you and for me this morning is to believe that Jesus is the resurrection and the life. That's how simple it is. To believe that begins to untangle the past and bring the hope of our future into the present in a way that shows Christ is invading our present regardless of how we have come in.

Let me just close with this. In John 20, starting in verse 24, the Bible tells us, **"Now Thomas, one of the Twelve, called the Twin, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, 'We have seen the Lord.'" Now, listen to Thomas. "But he said to them..." Here's his list. "Unless I see in his hands the mark of the nails, and place my finger into the mark of the nails, and place my hand into his side, I will never believe."**

Thomas has a checklist. "Here's what I need to believe. I'm going to not only need to see him. Just in case, I'm going to need to see the scars from the nails. Then I'm going to need to put my hands into those scars. Then I'm going to need to take my hand and touch that scar where they drove the spear up under his ribcage and punctured his heart." I love this. Look at what happens next.

**"Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, 'Peace be with you.'" Now, that sentence is necessary. The door is locked. The disciples are just hanging out. All of a sudden, Jesus is in the circle. "Hey, guys. Peace be with you." Then he immediately makes eye contact with Thomas. "Peace be with you." No explanation.**

Then he said to Thomas, **"Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.' Thomas answered him, 'My Lord and my God!' Jesus said to him, 'Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.'" We are, brothers and sisters, a group of men and women who have not physically seen Jesus. Yet, the testimony of so many of our lives is that everything has changed because of him.**

If you're a Christian, let me just lay before you a quick exercise before I pray for us. *Where would you be if Christ had not saved you?* If I think about my bloodline, if I think about Chandler men over the last 100 years and then think about where I am today, with no knock against my daddy or my daddy's daddy, they did the best they could with where they were.

Everything about my life has changed, from how I view my marriage and pursue my wife to how I see my children and engage with them to how I spend my money to what I think about friends and their place in my life to how hard I work. Everything has been shaped and molded...by the way, for the better...as future hope has been pulled into the present because I have believed that the tomb is empty.

If you're hung up on your past, I'm trying to tell you that if your sinfulness was too much for Jesus, he would still be in the grave. But because he is not, you believing your sin has more power than his resurrection is hogwash because he has shown that it has been paid in full, or he would be dead. If you still owed, he would still be dead. He's not, which means he paid it all, and the debt has been paid. What is available to you right now is the resurrection and the life, Christ himself. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. If we're honest, we are Lazarus. We are dead in our trespasses and sins. Yes, we can see ourselves in Martha, but we are Lazarus, many of us, dead in our trespasses and sins. Holy Spirit of God, I pray that you would wake us up, that you would call to us. For those really stuck in their past, Father, I just pray that you would begin to untangle that and redeem that and that they might be able to trust you in this moment with either their sin or their sorrow.

Father, I pray that you would woo out of weak-sauce religious platitudes so many who know something about you but don't really know you. I pray for those who feel like they're on the cusp of getting it all together that they would see that for the lie it is and that we might here shortly respond by trusting you as Lord and Savior, of giving our hearts fully to you. Help us. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.