

# EASTER - WHAT A DIFFERENCE!

1 Corinthians 15:1-15:11

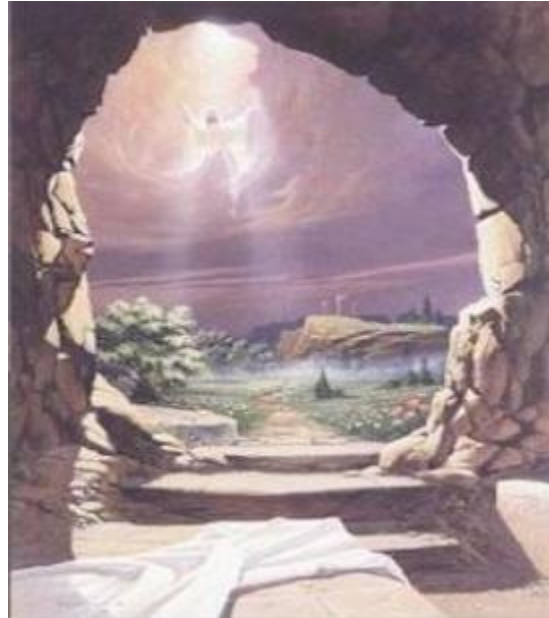
Pastor Eddie Ildefonso

Today is Easter Sunday and, as Christians, we have gathered to celebrate the resurrection of our Savior and Lord. But even as we celebrate, our hearts are heavy with the realization that much is wrong with our world.

Unrelenting hatred seems to rule supreme in the hearts and lives of so many and the fruits of terror are all too evident.

**ILLUSTRATION:** It was 11 years ago, on Feb. 27, 1991, at the height of Desert Storm, that Ruth Dillow received a very sad message from the Pentagon. It stated that her son, Clayton Carpenter, Private 1st Class, had stepped on a mine in Kuwait and was dead.

Ruth Dillow later wrote, "I can't begin to describe my grief and shock. It was almost more than I could bear. For 3 days I wept. For 3 days I expressed anger and loss. For 3 days people tried to comfort me, to no avail because the loss was too great."



But 3 days after she received that message, the telephone rang. The voice on the other end said, "Mom, it's me. I'm alive." Ruth Dillow said, "I couldn't believe it at first. But then I recognized his voice, and he really was alive." The message was all a mistake!

She said, "I laughed, I cried, I felt like turning cartwheels, because my son whom I had thought was dead, was really alive. I'm sure none of you can even begin to understand how I felt."

**A.** Perhaps not, but some who walked the pages of the New Testament would have understood how she felt because they experienced the same emotions themselves. One day they watched their best friend and teacher being nailed to a cross. They witnessed His pain as He cried out, "**I thirst!**" and "**My God, my God, why have You forsaken me?**"

They listened as finally He bowed His head and said, "**It is finished!**" and "**Father, into thy hands I commit my spirit.**" They watched as His body was taken from the cross and buried. All their hopes and dreams were buried with Him.

Friday and all day Saturday they mourned, until finally, on "**the first day of the week, early in the morning,**" the scripture says, some women made their way along the path that led to His tomb, wondering who would roll away the stone for them.

But when they arrived, they found that the stone had already been rolled away. And an angel there told them, "**You're looking in the wrong place. You're looking for Jesus among the dead. He is not dead. He is alive. He is risen, even as He said!**"

"**He is risen!**" That is what we celebrate this morning. When all the evidence is in we're convinced that Jesus is alive. He is risen from the dead, and what a difference His resurrection has made!

**B.** The **15th chapter of 1 Corinthians** is the great resurrection chapter of the Bible. In **vs's 1-11** Paul writes,

**"Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.**

**"For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He appeared to Peter, and then to the 12.**

**"After that, He appeared to more than 500 of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. Then He appeared to James, then to all the apostles, and last of all He appeared to me also."**

With that introduction, Paul goes on to present a tremendous testimony to the resurrection of Jesus. **Then he turns his attention to us, "Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" [15:51-52].**

With those words ringing in our ears, let us consider some of the changes, some of the transformations that the resurrection of Jesus has already made.

## **I.THE TRANSFORMATIONS OF THE CROSS AND THE TOMB**

To illustrate the transformations that His resurrection has already made, think about the cross and the tomb.

**A.** Before His resurrection, the cross was known only as an instrument of horrible death, rough wood soaked with human blood. So terrible was this form of execution that the Roman Empire prohibited the crucifixion of Roman citizens. Crucifixion was only for the worst of slaves and enemies of the empire.

But today, because of His resurrection, we wear a replica of the cross as a piece of jewelry, a thing of beauty, for all around the world the cross is seen as a symbol of hope, and a reminder of God's love for us.

**B.** And what about His tomb? **Before the resurrection**, for most of the world, **the grave was looked upon as the final chapter**, the closing of a great door, the end of everything.

But because of His resurrection, we can rejoice today that beyond death is where life really begins, and it will never end. That makes you wonder, doesn't it, why we spend so much time worrying and fretting about material things?

**ILLUSTRATION:** Dale Evans once said, "I spent most of my life searching for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. Then I finally found it at the foot of the cross."

All our lives, it seems, we work and struggle to accumulate things that we think are important. But when we're dealing with death and what happens after death, then all these things seem so unimportant, so inconsequential. What difference does it really make what kind of car we drive? Or what kind of house we live in? Or what clothes we wear? If we're talking about eternity, then what difference do things really make?

**On one side of the resurrection, everything we see is temporary. Only the things we cannot see are eternal. What a difference the resurrection makes!**

## **II. THE TRANSFORMATION OF TIME**

**Then there is the transformation of time. Before the resurrection, time was a limited thing.** The Bible talks about the breath of life that we have in our nostrils, and then it is gone. And there is no promise that when we exhale that we will inhale again. Life is brief indeed.

**ILLUSTRATION:** Sometimes when I'm shaving in the morning, I look in the mirror and think, "My goodness, I look old, but with a good night's sleep tonight, maybe I'll look better tomorrow." Then I hear a still, small voice saying, "Don't count on it. This is the best it's ever going to be!"

That's rather discouraging, isn't it? You see, time is slipping by. It's going so fast that it's hard to hold on to anything, isn't it? On one side of the resurrection, time is brief.

**SUMMARY:** But on the other side there is Jesus and eternity, and that changes the whole purpose and meaning and scope of our life.

## **III. THE TRANSFORMATION OF LIFE**

**A.** Then there is the transformation of life itself. Have you been listening to the

messages of the world lately? Have you been hearing the voices of hopelessness and despair that seem to be so pervasive today?

Suddenly we have become so painfully and personally aware of the presence of terrorism on our planet. The men and women of our armed forces are spread across the globe engaged in what will undoubtedly be a prolonged battle against the forces of hatred and evil. And the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians continues on and on.

There are diseases for which we have no cures. There are problems in the home. Children are being abused. People are sleeping on the streets.

If you watch and listen very long, you can be filled with despair. And if the only hope that we have is the hope that this world offers, we have no hope because the message of this world is despair.

In contrast, Jesus said, **"I have come to bring you life and that more abundantly, to show you how to live, to bring you hope and joy and peace and love, to give you a reason for living."**

**SUMMARY:** Even if life is wracked with pain, even if there is loneliness and sorrow, you'll be able to go on; you'll find the strength that comes through Jesus and the power of His resurrection.

#### **IV. THE TRANSFORMATION OF DEATH**

**Finally there is the transformation of death.** Before the resurrection, death was the end. Before the resurrection, death was the final curtain call. Before the resurrection, all we could do is mourn as those who have no hope.

But after the resurrection, when someone dies, we mourn because we have lost a loved one. But we mourn as people who have great hope because Jesus Christ is alive, and the promise of Scripture is that if He is alive, then we, too, can live forever. Our sins are forgiven by His shed blood, and we have the promise of everlasting life. It changes the whole concept of death itself.

**ILLUSTRATION:** In **Henry Garity's** book, **"Portraits of Perseverance,"** Carl was a very rich man who owned a great estate. One of his favorite pastimes was riding horseback through his valley, looking at everything he owned and congratulating himself on his great wealth.

One day, as Carl was riding along, he came up over a hill and in the distance saw one of his tenant farmers, an old man named Hans. It was lunch time, and Hans had set a little table under a shade tree and was getting ready to eat. But before he ate, he bowed his head and folded his hands in prayer to thank God for his food.

Carl watched the old man as he prayed. Then he looked at his meal. It was only a slice of coarse bread and a piece of cheese. With a sneer Carl said, "If that's all I had to eat, I

wouldn't even bother to pray." Hans replied humbly, "It's enough, and I'm thankful that God has provided it."

Taken aback by the old man's answer, Carl turned his horse and prepared to ride away. But before he could leave, old Hans said, "Wait a minute. I need to tell you something. I had a dream last night. In my dream I saw a beautiful scene, and then I heard a voice saying, 'Tonight the richest man in the valley will die. Tonight the richest man in the valley will die.'"

"Poppycock!" said Carl as he rode off toward home. But as he was riding, the words of old Hans haunted him, "Tonight the richest man in the valley will die." Up until then he had felt quite well, but now he was beginning to experience pains in his chest. He wondered, "Could it possibly be true? Am I going to die tonight?"

When he reached home he called his doctor and told him of old Hans's dream and of the pains that he had been feeling. The doctor said, "Well, it doesn't sound like anything you ought to be concerned about, but just to put your mind at ease, I'll come over and examine you."

So the doctor did. After the examination was over he said, "Carl, you're as strong as a horse. There's no way you're going to die tonight." Carl said, "Well, I feel mighty foolish that I paid any attention to the old man's dream about the richest man in the valley dying tonight. But I just wanted to be certain."

So, reassured, Carl went to bed. The next morning there was a knock on his door, and the messenger said, "Carl, old Hans died last night." Truly, the richest man in the valley died last night.

**SUMMARY:** Paul wrote, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" "Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through Jesus Christ, our Lord." You see, the resurrection makes the difference.

**CONCLUSION:** Before, things seemed so important. But now they have become pretty insignificant. Before, time was so limited. But now there is all eternity. Before, life was filled with despair. But now it has purpose and direction and meaning. Before, death was the end. But now it is the beginning.

So whatever your decision may be this morning, we offer His invitation, and we pray that you will respond to it as we stand and as we sing together.