

Famous Last Words: Reunion

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[0 : 00] Lord, help us to live in the gladness and grace of Easter Sunday every day. Let us have hearts of thankfulness for your sacrifice.

Let us have eyes that look upon your grace and rejoice in our salvation. Help us to walk in that mighty grace and tell your good news to the world.

We pray all of this for your glory, Lord. Amen. Good morning, everyone. Happy Easter.

My name is Kent Dixon. It's my privilege to be the lead pastor here at Braemart Baptist Church. And also, I want us to say another phrase that we've already said this morning.

He is risen. It's a phrase that we only say around Easter time. But we can claim every day. And if you're here this morning visiting with us with a friend or a family member, you're here as a neighbor from our community.

[1 : 07] Welcome. You may have come here this morning because Easter holds meaning for you. From your past, from your family background. And we want to welcome you here this morning.

We're so glad to have you with us because we want you to feel welcome here, not just this morning, but every time you come to visit. And as Leah mentioned this morning, there's a clipboard in the pew on one end.

So I stole this idea from a church that I came from, and I like it. So it's called the Friendship Clipboard. So if you could pass the clipboards down the row, fill out your information, indicate whether you're new, whether you're visiting, share your information with us.

We would love to send you a personal greeting. And thank you for being here this morning so that we can connect with you more directly. So even if you're here every Sunday, we encourage you to fill that out.

So there's simply no other way to say it, that today, Easter Sunday, is the most significant day of the year. For many people, that significance lies in getting together with family, as you might do at Christmas or during summer family get-togethers.

[2 : 18] But today is also much more significant, because it's the day when Christians around the world recognize that Jesus rose from the dead.

Thank you. For some of us here this morning, this may be the first time that you're hearing that. This may be new to you.

And I'd love to talk with you after the service. If you have questions about anything that you hear this morning, this is the first time you're hearing what I'm talking about this morning, or the 70th time.

If you have questions, come and see me, because I'd love to talk. Because I don't have all the answers, and we can figure them out together. But through his death and resurrection, that's the mystery of it for us.

Jesus Christ conquered death once and for all, not only for himself, but for all of humanity. Folks, this is not a children's story.

[3 : 24] This is not fiction. This is victory. This is truth. This is historical fact. What Jesus did at the cross was both a game changer and a life changer.

Over the course of the past few weeks, through the season of Lent, this time that the church calendar leads up to Easter, and certainly during this past week leading up to Good Friday and today, we've hopefully taken time to reflect on what Easter means.

Like many other church holidays, Easter has developed another identity, which many of us may enjoy as well. At Easter, we have fun with our children and grandchildren, talking about the Easter bunny, maybe having an Easter egg hunt like we did here at church yesterday.

And perhaps this morning or later today, children in your home, and lucky adults too, will be enjoying some chocolate and other treats. And maybe you'll be getting together with family and enjoying a great meal.

Those are truly special times that build great memories. But at the heart of this springtime holiday, filled with colored eggs and chocolate and bunnies, there's much more that we can celebrate and recognize together.

[4 : 47] Over the past few weeks here at Braemar, we've been in a series, don't panic, this is a standalone, you won't have missed anything. We've been in a series called Famous Last Words, and we've focused on the last words or phrases that Jesus Christ said from the cross as they're recorded in the Bible.

We've looked at the concepts of forgiveness and salvation, relationship and abandonment, distress, human emotion.

And on Friday we talked about triumph. And all of these concepts are reflected in those words of Jesus that are recorded in the books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, the Gospels in the Bible. And we've explored together through those phrases how they help us see directly into the heart of God and his great love for us.

Particularly through the work accomplished by Jesus at the cross. Because through his words of forgiveness, Jesus asked God, his Father, for forgiveness for someone else.

[6 : 08] And that forgiveness that he gave on that day is freely available for us today. We've seen how his words of salvation to the criminal who recognized him that day is a free gift that we can accept without judgment.

We've seen how deeply Jesus valued relationship when he was on earth. And how deeply he longs to be very close to us every day of our lives.

We've also recognized that human pain and suffering that Jesus experienced on the cross. A sense of abandonment as he was deserted by many of his friends and followers.

And spiritual and physical distress through which he can intimately relate with our own human pain and suffering.

Just two days ago at our Good Friday service in our sermon titled Triumph, we reflected on the sixth phrase of Jesus from John 19, 29 and 30.

[7 : 20] A jar of wine vinegar was there, so they soaked a sponge in it, put the sponge on a stalk of the hyssop plant, and lifted it to Jesus' lips.

When he had received the drink, Jesus said, it is finished. And with that, he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.

It is finished. This morning you may be thinking, wow, this has been a long series, but it is finished. Hopefully not, but you're not wrong.

We've been on quite a journey together through this series here at Braemar, and we've explored many different passages of scripture and many concepts. But it, my friends, has all led to this day, Easter Sunday, and this final phrase of Jesus that we'll look at this morning.

We read this last phrase of Jesus in Luke 23, 44 to 46. It was now about noon, and darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon, for the sun had stopped shining.

[8 : 39] And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. Jesus called out with a loud voice, Father, into your hands I commit my spirit.

But when he had said this, he breathed his last. It's appropriate that we conclude our series this morning with our sermon titled Reunion.

As we come to the end of our series and consider these last words of Jesus, we have to recognize something very important about the cross.

The man, Jesus Christ, actually died that day. That's the literal, again, my favorite picture of Jesus that I've seen.

That's the literal historical fact that we remember on Good Friday, that Jesus Christ was a real man who lived and walked the earth more than 2,000 years ago.

[9 : 48] Napoleon, John F. Kennedy, these are historical figures, and Jesus Christ was no different. He was a man who lived. But to truly comprehend, to even begin to comprehend fully who Jesus is, we also recognize that the man who died was also the Son of God.

And here's the life-changing part. That man who died was resurrected three days later and left the earth to be reunited with God his Father.

As you study the idea of resurrection, there are many theories that suggest that Jesus somehow faked his own death.

That he somehow wasn't really dead. We don't have time this morning to go into details like that. But some, bless you, but some suggested that he may have simply fainted and had been taken down from the cross unconscious.

That he was later revived. That he walked away. And the goal of the majority of these theories is to debunk the resurrection.

[11 : 12] Because quite simply, you may have wrestled with this yourself, if Jesus Christ, that man, did not die, if Jesus Christ was not resurrected from the dead three days later, not surprisingly, the core of the Christian faith collapses.

The Apostle Paul is very clear about this in 1 Corinthians 15. He says that if Jesus was not raised from the dead three days after he died, then our faith has no meaning.

It's that simple. If Jesus was not reunited with God his Father, our hope of being reunited with Jesus or with others who have believed in him and died before us is lost.

It's a hopeless faith. And as I touched on, theory suggests that either Jesus really wasn't dead or that his followers, he died and somehow his followers took his body and hid it.

And all of these theories have one goal, to refute the truth that Jesus Christ, the man who died, also came back to life three days later.

[12 : 35] And it is Jesus' resurrection, not his death, but his resurrection that we recognize and celebrate on Easter Sunday. we celebrate in words that we say to each other, as we've said this morning.

We celebrate it in the songs that we sing. It's the core of our faith. For the Roman centurions who stood watch over Jesus and the other two men who were being crucified that day, they had one main job, to ensure their prisoners died and to be there to witness it.

They flogged them after they had been tried and convicted and they made sure both their prisoners and the crosses made that long journey from the flogging to the hill called Golgotha where the crucifixions happened.

And they would have made sure their prisoners paid the ultimate price for their crimes as they had been sentenced. They would have made sure they were dead.

To put it bluntly, the Roman centurions who oversaw crucifixion were, there's no other way to say it, professional killers. And they were very, very good at their jobs.

[14 : 02] They were accomplished in making sure that anyone who was crucified on their watch would never be reunited with their mother or father, their siblings, or any of their friends.

Historians suggest that if a Roman centurion had somehow missed the fact that Jesus had simply fainted and had let his followers take his living body away they would have paid for that critical mistake with their own lives.

It's that simple. And it had been confirmed by many eyewitnesses that Jesus had died on that day. There really is more evidence for the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in history than there is to not believe that.

rest in that for a moment. Far harder, far more difficult, almost impossible based on the historical record that we have proven by both biblical scholars and historians who have no self-interest in proving otherwise, that it actually happened.

God died. And Jesus confirmed with his own words that day that he was dying, that his body was failing him, and that ultimately he was releasing his spirit into the hands of his father.

[15 : 38] father. Jesus Christ, the son of God, had left his human body behind to be buried.

But Jesus died with confidence. He was confident that he was fulfilling his work on earth, and he was confident that he was being cared for by his father.

father. Jesus took the sin of the world on his own shoulders that day, so that we could be forgiven by God and reunited with him, not only in relationship while we live, but after this life.

On Easter Sunday, we celebrate. We celebrate the fact that Jesus is alive. that he conquered death not only for himself, but for all of humanity, if we choose to recognize and follow him.

When we choose to sin, when we choose our own way for ourselves instead of God's perfect way for us, we will always experience peace, less than.

[17 : 05] Less than a complete sense of fulfillment, less than a sense of peace and contentment, less than a complete reunion with Jesus Christ.

God loves each one. As a child, the first Bible verse I memorized, and I'm sure many of you can relate, was John 3, 16.

Lots of smiles. For God, say it with me, for God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.

God loves each one of us so much that his ultimate plan not only reached out to every one of us, but it also included the greatest sacrifice a parent could ever make.

And that sacrifice, my friends, was made willingly by God, by Jesus, for you and for me.

[18 : 22] And just as confidently as Jesus placed his human life into the hands of God his Father, we have the opportunity to trust our lives in God's hands with the same confidence.

habits. Sometimes the Christian life, the Christian faith can seem so complicated, but really it all comes down to love.

love. In John 15, 13, Jesus said, greater love has no one than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

He willingly laid down his life for me and for you. love. And in Mark 12, 30, and 31, we read the words of Jesus as he gave his greatest commandments to us.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. And the second is this, love your neighbor as yourself.

[19 : 46] There's no commandment greater than these. these few verses so beautifully capture the message of Easter and the mission of Jesus Christ.

There was only one way, one way to bridge the gap humanity had willingly dug between ourselves and God.

By choosing our own way over God's way for us, we dug that gap. in choosing our own selfish and fleeting wants and desires over the true fulfillment God has for us in relationship with him.

But through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, my friends, we have received an amazing gift. forgiveness, the gift of forgiveness, the gift of community, the gift of reunion.

And as people who have received that gift, we are called to respond to God in love and share the love of God with others.

[21 : 04] us. My friends, the Easter message I want to leave with you this morning is one of hope, one of grace, one of forgiveness that is freely given in exchange for our sin and selfishness.

we simply don't deserve it and it simply doesn't matter. And in that hope, we look forward to a reunion greater than any earthly one we can imagine, where we will see Jesus ourselves face to face.

Imagine that just for a moment. What will that be like? we'll see him face to face and experience that awesome, all-encompassing love of God for eternity.

If you heard this story before, this good news before, I ask you to live in it.

I ask you to share it with others. And I ask you to reflect it in all that you say and do.

[22 : 40] And as I touched on, if this story is new to you this morning, I pray that it would be new to all of us in some way this morning, actually. but if it's brand new, or if you've heard it but you're still trying to understand what it all means, or how it could possibly be for you, please come and see me after the service.

Because you know what? it is for you. Jesus is alive today.

As alive today as when he came back to life and appeared to so many people more than 2,000 years ago.

I don't know about you, but I've been a Christian a long time. And when I stop and think about these ideas, these realities, takes my breath away.

He's as alive today, as alive in the same way today. And he longs to have a relationship with you today, right now.

[24 : 01] Happy Easter because Jesus is alive. let's pray. Lord God, you love this world so much that you gave your one and only son that we might be called your children too.

Lord, help us to live in the gladness and grace of Easter Sunday every day. let us have hearts of thankfulness for your sacrifice.

Let us have eyes that look upon your grace and rejoice in our salvation. Help us to walk in that mighty grace and tell your good news to the world.

We pray these things all for your glory, Lord. Amen. My brothers and sisters, may the joy of the resurrection and the hope of Easter fill your hearts and minds this whole year.

Easter is not just today. It is the core of what we believe and the core of what is yours to receive. Go in peace with this blessed assurance and have a great week.

[25 : 28] There is lots of food left over from breakfast this morning. Go and eat with the blessing of the Lord upon it. Go in peace. Go in peace.