

# Moving Past Our Past

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Date: 27 April 2025

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[ 0 : 00 ] Welcome here for this Sunday, April 27th, 2025. You all know me. I looked from the back of the sanctuary.! But I am still Kent Dixon. It's still my joy to be the pastor here.

We're continuing in this short sermon series that we began on Easter Sunday called Made New, How Easter Changes Everything. The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything.

Would you agree? Okay. The residual effects of Easter echo into our present-day reality, as men and women continue to place their faith, their hope, and their trust in the risen Savior.

We considered last week that the journey of faith begins with confession, but it's also sustained after that by ongoing commitment. Because when we are found in Christ, the old ways of living are gone, and we are made new.

Last weekend, we had the joy of celebrating Easter. I paused for a point during this week. I said to Michelle, Was last weekend Easter weekend? And she said, Yeah.

[ 1 : 11 ] And I said, Wow, it feels like a year ago and ten minutes ago. So, we celebrate the fact that Jesus is alive at Easter, right?

And the same power that raised Jesus from the dead is available to us today. This means that through our faith in Jesus, God gives us all we need to live a transformed life and to be made new. Last week, we considered how it's our faith in Jesus, actually, that makes us new. When we confess with our mouths that Jesus is our Lord, and when we believe in our hearts that God raised him from the dead, we will be saved.

That, my friends, is the good news of Easter. That is also good news for today as well. Our sermon this morning is titled, as you can see on the screen, Moving Past Our Past.

And this morning, we're going to take a look at the far-reaching effects of the resurrection. That's what this series is about. And one of the incredible results of our faith in Jesus is that we are given the power to move past our past.

[ 2 : 29 ] One of the greatest obstacles, I think, in growing in our faith is the inability to receive the forgiveness of God. Is that controversial?

Is that a challenge for you? Do you find yourself getting stuck in a rut of self-judgment? Have you self-determined that you are somehow not worthy of God's forgiveness?

That's a problem, because it is freely given to you. So hear this. Our mistakes, our shortcomings, our failures, do not have the last word and say over us.

They do not. Our living Savior is the only one who has the final say over us and over our lives. I had many conversations with a friend of mine who is in the final stages of his life.

He had struggled with many health concerns over many years. He missed his loved ones deeply who had gone before him. He knew where they were, but sometimes that wasn't enough.

[ 3 : 43 ] And the health burdens that he faced were really wearing him down. He was ready to meet Jesus. I always enjoyed our visits, and he would sometimes tell me of the regrets that he had, or the things that he wished he had said and done, or the things he wished he hadn't.

But he also told me of how much his children shared with them, how much they loved him. They were so deeply grateful for all the ways in which he had supported and encouraged them over the years.

He was their champion, and they loved him for it. So despite the regrets that he may have felt, the shortcomings he may have perceived in himself, the reality of what he meant to others and how they perceived him was quite different.

So there's something about becoming aware of your own mortality that may cause you to wrestle with the past, right? We're all, I think, most of us are in that final third.

Final quarter? There is more time behind us than what lies ahead of us. Not all of us find ourselves in the same situation as the man I just talked about.

[ 5 : 08 ] But every one of us can feel held back at times by our history. I think that's fair. But the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus has changed everything.

Remember, I said, only Jesus has the final say. The death and resurrection of Jesus proves God's deep and abiding love for us.

And it also makes God's grace available to us. And by that grace, and only in the name of Jesus, we are forgiven.

We can be made new. Many biblical characters that we can recognize throughout Scripture struggle to reconcile their past, right?

We can see that throughout Scripture. And one particular man is named Paul. We're getting a thorough refresher on Paul's story in our ongoing sermon series in Acts.

[ 6 : 10 ] And we'll return to that in a few weeks. And before Paul had an encounter with Jesus, his name was Saul, as we know. He intensely persecuted God's church.

And he was a sworn enemy. He would have declared this a sworn enemy of God's people. He did many things that would have been a source of shame and guilt when he converted.

So Paul addresses his approach to his past as he writes to the church in Philippi. So let's hear the words in Philippians 3, 13 and 14. And you can turn to that or listen.

Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do, you know this. Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead.

I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. So Paul first acknowledges there that he hasn't arrived yet, which is fair.

[ 7 : 18 ] He was still trying to gain an understanding of what Christ's death and resurrection ultimately meant for him. He understood, but he was still recognizing that he was on the journey.

He knew the destination to which God had called him still lay before him. He was a work in progress. Can you feel that yourself?

Paul declared his commitment to allowing God to finish the work in him by seeking to forget what was behind him.

It's an important message. All of the evil things that Paul, Saul, Paul had done to early Christians, he was seeking with God's help to forget about, to put behind him.

So he wasn't somehow making a decision to sidestep responsibility, right? Oh, now that I have met Jesus, that weight was still on him.

[ 8 : 18 ] But instead, he was confident that God had great things planned for him in the future. And he was fully confident that he had been forgiven for what he had done.

He knew that if he spent his days focused on what had happened in the past, dwelling in the past, wallowing in self-pity, and thereby discounting God's grace, he wouldn't be prepared for what was to come, for the work that lay ahead, for the hope that was ahead of him.

When you drive a vehicle, there are many things that your instructor or teacher will want to make sure you understand. Obviously, you need to know how everything works, the gas and the brake.

Sometimes we have to remind people the brake is the wide one, the gas is the narrow one. Do you ever find yourself thinking that in traffic? We need to know headlights and turn signals.

We need to make sure that they work, ideally, before you get on the road. But one important thing we're hopefully all taught to check right from day one is what?

[ 9 : 35 ] Don't say gas gauge. Our mirrors, right? Our mirrors. We don't have eyes in the back of our heads, despite how you feel.

So we need to rely on those mirrors, our side mirrors, our rear view mirrors, to make sure that we're fully aware of what is going on around us. And our mirrors are a big help.

But it's actually not knowing what's around us and behind us that's most important. We need to look through the windshield.

That's pretty critical, right? We need to look forward in the direction that we're going. We need to look ahead. Like driving a car, we were never meant to navigate our lives looking behind us.

God created us. He wants us to look ahead and move forward. God created us. We can recognize that that's what Paul was choosing to do here, to live through the windshield of his life, rather than focused on the rear view mirror.

[10:47] Some of us in this room may find ourselves stuck in a rut because we have decided we can't or won't receive the grace and forgiveness of God and in turn forgive ourselves.

Do you feel a little bit blinded at times, thinking that, well, I can't let go of that. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have said that. All those kinds of things. Guess what? God forgives you for that, if you ask him, if you bring it to him.

So forgive yourself. The truth is, unless you have a time machine, and none of us do, there's no way to revisit history.

Right? That's the honest truth. There's no way to rewrite it. What is done has been done. Period. When we relive our past by saying things, oh, we would have done this, we could have done that, we should, you know how much I hate that one, we should have done such and such, we're not bringing about any kind of meaningful change.

Instead, we're actually robbing ourselves of the good work that Jesus has done in our lives.

Through his sacrifice on the cross, the good work that he wants to do in our lives is calling us on, calling us forward to move ahead towards heaven.

[12:16] If we focus on the past, for any sailors in the crowd, I took some sailing lessons a million years ago, we become like a sailboat in the wind, in the water, with no wind.

That's one of the most frustrating things in sailing lessons that I took, was no wind. It's called a sailboat. Pretty frustrating to be sitting in dead air on the water, needing to get somewhere.

We become stagnant if we focus on the past. We have no source of power to move us forward if we're constantly looking backwards.

What do we need to do to move past our past? We have to put it to death. Now, let me pause here. I'm not saying we shouldn't learn from our mistakes.

I'm not saying we shouldn't learn lessons from things that we did to make sure we don't repeat them. But that's not really the main focus. Being made new is no easy task.

[13:28] Can you relate to that yourself? We're often tempted to peek, to look behind us and feel regret, feel guilt.

Feel shame, right? That's human nature. But to access the power that's available to us in the resurrection, we must align ourselves with Jesus' life, his death, and his resurrection.

Paul writes about this in the book of Galatians. So if you want to turn to Galatians 2, 20 and 21, or you can listen, you know this too. Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me, and for you, I might add. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

So according to Paul there, our past mistakes, our sins, our shortcomings, our missteps, must be crucified with Christ. They must be nailed to that cross with him and put to death.

[14:54] Only by dying to our old selves, you've heard this before, can we truly come alive to all the new possibilities and opportunities that God has for us.

If we're stuck in the past and focusing on the past, friends, we are missing the glorious hope of the future. That old self must be removed so that Jesus can take up residence in us and live through us. Paul tells us that this is possible only by faith in the loving grace of God. In fact, Paul says, he makes it very clear in his teaching that aside from the grace of God, there's no way to be made new.

Jesus said he was the way. He was right. We live our lives often as sinful and broken individuals. And if we do that, if we allow ourselves to do that, we make mistakes. We will continue to make mistakes. The sinful things that we do hurt God, hurt others, hurt ourselves when we make those selfish choices.

[16:16] When we lie, when we cheat, or steal, or gossip. There's so many things that we can recognize. And the more we add those sinful thoughts and words and actions to our lives, the more actually regret will grow.

The more it will cloud our past, our present, and our future as God wants us to understand them. As he wants us to see those things through his eyes. Eventually, we need something or someone to clean up our past so that we can live unhindered.

Two guesses who that might be, or I'll give you one. This is what the Bible tells us that Jesus did on the cross. His blood and his sacrifice is the payment for our sin.

His sacrifice acts as a cleansing agent in our lives. And his resurrection is the proof, undeniable, unquestionable proof of the power of the cross.

When we put our past to death by nailing it to the cross of Christ, we're then released from its power in our lives. We are made new.

[ 17 : 39 ] We are made clean. Don't you want to feel new and clean? Paul gives us the secret to how we're to live in the light of the forgiveness of God.

In the passage from Galatians that we read earlier, Paul said that he now lives his life by faith in the Son of God. That's his primary focus.

God's grace. And in the past, then, however, just because our past has been forgiven, here's the bummer part of it. It doesn't mean we won't make mistakes, right?

It doesn't mean we won't sin. It doesn't mean we won't mess up. But to live truly in the newness of life that Jesus offers us, we still need to move forward.

We have forgiveness. We have access to God's grace. Our faith in God gives us the confidence that it's because of his love that we have been forgiven.

[ 18 : 43 ] God's love equals God's forgiveness. And it's because of his love that we can receive forgiveness for our past, our present, and our future.

I think we sometimes may tend to forget that the creator of the universe is also our creator.

Right? I think we tend to recognize the great vastness of God's glory, which is important, but also he created you and me with the same love and attention.

He's also our father. He treats us with compassion. He addresses our brokenness. He sees it. He addresses it with love and care and kindness.

Psalms 103, verse 8, says, the Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in love.

[ 19 : 53 ] Friends, God's love for us is vast and it is deep. And it's because of that love for us that our past is covered.

Sometimes I think it's helpful to imagine in our minds the face of God before us. Or is that too terrifying? Some people may see disappointment on that face or imagine that he's constantly frustrated and disappointed by our sin.

But the Bible tells us that God's attention and attitude towards us, it's approval, it's acceptance, it is forgiveness, and it is deep, deep affection.

not because of anything that we have done, hear that, but because of what Jesus has done on our behalf.

Listen to this quote from a man named Joseph R. Cook. Grace is nothing more or less than the face that love wears when it meets imperfection, weakness, failure, sin.

[ 21 : 16 ] grace is what love is and does when it meets the sinful and undeserving. It's what enables us to see beyond one another's faults so that we can love one another without reference to whether that love has been either earned or if it is deserved.

It's what God does when he reaches out in love, sinful as we are, and welcomes us into a relationship with himself. Friends, you can move past your past because of the grace of God.

You may need to seek forgiveness for something that has happened, something that you're holding on to or trying to maybe pretend never happened. You may even need to put boundaries in place in your life.

You may need to live differently in the future. But what you don't need to do, however, is carry around guilt and shame. Friends, the cross allows you to move past your past.

God invites you to live with a future focus. My brothers and sisters, rather than dwelling in the past, ask God to help you live with eager anticipation of what lies ahead.

[ 22 : 45 ] Amen.