

# WHAT DIFFERENCE DOES EASTER MAKE?

## Easter Messages

Rick Warren

### What Does The Resurrection Mean? It Means...

#### 1. Jesus is who he claimed to be.

*"I am the Resurrection and the Life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies."*  
John 11:25

*"I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one can get to God the Father except by means of me."* John 14:6 (LB)

#### 2. Jesus has the power he claimed to have.

*"All power in heaven and on earth is given to me."* Matt. 28:18 (Ph)

*"No one takes my life from me. I have the power to lay it down and I have the power to take it up again."* John 10:18 (Ph)

#### 3. Jesus does what he promises to do.

*"They will mock... and flog... and kill me; but after three days I will come back to life again."*  
Mark 10:34 (LB)

*The angel said, `Don't be frightened! I know you are looking for Jesus who was crucified, but he isn't here! He has come back to life again, just as he said he would."* Matt. 28:5-6 (LB)

## **Why Does the Resurrection Matter? Because Now ...**

### **1. My past can be forgiven.**

*"He has forgiven all our sins... and canceled every record of the debt we owed; Christ has done away with it by nailing it to the cross." Col. 3:14 (JB)*

*"There is no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ." Rom. 8:1 (LB)*

### **2. My present problems can be managed.**

*"How incredibly great is his power to help those who believe Him ... the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead!" Eph. 1:20 (LB)*

*"I am ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives in me." Phil. 4:13 (Ph)*

### **3. My future can be secured.**

*"This is the way to have eternal life - by knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ, the one he sent to earth!" John 17:3 (LB)*

*"We have been born again into a life full of hope through Christ's rising from the dead." 1 Peter 1:3*

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#### Selected Scriptures

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One of my favorite magazines is *U.S. News & World Report*. I like it because there's a section in there called "News You Can Use" which implies that there is a lot of news you can't use. That's true. We live in a very information society. There's an information glut. But a lot of what's out I really don't need to know.

I don't want to waste my time tonight and I don't want to waste your time so we're going to talk about News That You Can Use. A lot of time you can go to a church and you hear news you can't use.

Tonight I don't want to waste any time; I want to get right to the point. I feel like the chicken that decided to lay an egg on the California freeway. The rooster said, "Here's how you do it. You lay it on the line and you do it in a hurry!" That's what I want to do tonight. I want to lay it on the line and do it in a hurry.

Two questions: Easter, the resurrection. What does it mean and why does it matter? There are a lot of things you could have done tonight rather than come sit in a gymnasium. In the next 24 hours over a billion people will celebrate easter all around the world. How is it something could happen 1991 years ago, approximately, and still cause traffic jams today? What does it mean?

A lot of people say, "I believe in the resurrection. I just don't understand it." George Gallup did a poll this last year and said that even 84% of the people who never go to church, believe that Jesus rose from the dead. It's an historical fact. It wasn't done in secret. The whole city of Jerusalem knew about it and eventually the whole Roman Empire. It was news. If CNN had been there, they would have had it live. There are at least 15 historical references to Jesus meeting people, touching people, talking with people. One time He cooked breakfast for some people. One time He talked to about 500 people after He had risen from the dead. A lot of people saw Him.

What does it mean? Three things.

1. Jesus is who He claimed to be.
2. Jesus has the power He claimed to have
3. Jesus does what He promised to do.

That's what it means.

### 1. JESUS IS WHO HE CLAIMED TO BE

John 11:25 *"I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live even though He dies."* Jesus made some outrageous claims when He was here on earth. He said things like, "I'm God.... I'm perfect ... I'm the only way to heaven ... I'm the Savior of the world..." A lot of

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people try to make Jesus a good teacher. A good teacher would never say that. I could go out and teach people in the Valley all kinds of good moral truths and they'd say, "Rick's a good teacher". But if I started calling myself God you wouldn't think I was a good teacher any more.

Jesus was either who He said He was or He was the biggest liar who ever lived. He said, "I am God." He made some claims and He said, What I'm going to do is going to validate who I am.

One day Jesus cleared the money changers out of the temple. They had turned the temple into a kind of Orange County flea market. He went in and 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. After you kill me, I'm going to come back to life three days later." He claimed to be God and His resurrection backs up what He claimed to be.

John 14:6 *"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can get to God the Father except by means of me."* That's a pretty strong claim. Circle "the". He said I'm the way. He didn't say, I'm one way, I'm a good way, I'm one of the ways. Saying, "All roads get to heaven" is stupid. That's like saying I can dial any phone number and get home. There's one number that will get me home.

He says, I'm the truth. That means any other way is not the truth if He's right. He claimed to be God. He says, *"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. Every time you write a check, every time you date a contract, every time you put down an appointment in your little blue book what's the reference point? 1991 years from what? Jesus came to earth. God came to earth in the form of a man so we could know what God is like. His name was Jesus Christ. He split all of history into A.D. and B.C. Every time you write a date, Jesus is the reference point. He said He was who He claimed to be.

## 2. JESUS SHOWS HE HAD THE POWER HE CLAIMED TO HAVE

He said *"All power on earth and in heaven is given to me."* Because He was God He could do everything God could 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 Him in the tomb. The Romans killed Him, they put Him in a tomb, they put the big stone in front of the tomb and then sealed it with the Roman seal and they posted a 24-hour guard. They were only trying to prevent the inevitable. He had all the power in the world. He said, They can't stop me. I can give My life way and I can take it up again. (That's where they get the phrase, "You can't keep a good man down!")

## 3. JESUS DOES WHAT HE PROMISES TO DO

Mark 10:34 *"They will mock and flog and kill me but after three days I will come back to life."* The cross was no surprise to Jesus. It was all part of God's plan.

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When you think about it there's humor in the Easter story. How would you feel if you'd been the guys who put Jesus to death? You publicly executed this man in front of thousands of witnesses who had seen Him die. Then you have Him buried, a stone put over, sealed and a 24-hour guard. Three days later this guy's up and walking around the city again. What do you say if you meet Him on the sidewalk?

*"The angel said, 'Don't be frightened. I know you're looking for Jesus who was crucified. He's come back to life again just as He said He would.'" Circle "just as He said He would." He did what He promised. When god makes a promise, you can count on it.*

That's what it means. Because Jesus did rise, He is who He said He was, He has the power He said He had and He kept the promises that He made. So what?

I want us to look at this other question. **Why does the resurrection matter?** What difference does it make? We're talking about News You Can Use. So what if Jesus is who He said He was? What does it mean to me in 1991 in southern Orange County USA?

It means three things. Because Jesus is who He claimed to be and because He has the power He claimed to have and because Jesus does what He promises to do...

### 1. MY PAST CAN BE FORGIVEN

And that's good news. Have you ever been half way through a project and wish you could start over? Like painting the house or whatever? A lot of times I think people feel that way about life. They get half way through life and just wish they could start over. We all have things we wish we hadn't done and said things we wish we hadn't said, thought things we wish we hadn't thought. We all have regrets. We all feel bad about things. We all have guilt.

I was watching a Colombo rerun the other night. Johnny Cash was the bad guy. When Columbo figures it all out and pulls the trap, Cash, when he finally admits he was the murderer says, "I'm glad I don't have to pretend any more. The guilt was killing me."

A fellow pastor received this letter, "I'm 31 years old and divorced, though I fought the divorce bitterly. I feel badly. 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 I'm on the verge of a collapse. Something is very wrong. But I feel so hurt and embittered that I can scarcely react or relate to others any more. I feel as if I'm going to have to sit out the rest of my life in the penalty box."

The tragedy is, I know a lot of people like that. They can't get on with the present and the future because they're stuck in the past. Some guilt or regret or something has tied them down. Sometimes it's a former relationship and they're letting it mess up their current relationship. That's not too smart. They say, "I guess I'll just have to live with this the rest of my life." And they're running around with this baggage -- emotional garbage -- trying to live life and they're wondering why they're not happy.

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Colossians 3:14 is the good news. *"He has forgiven all our sins and canceled every record of the debt we owed. Christ has done away with it by nailing it to the cross."* This is God's pardon program. He says He nailed it all to the cross. Jesus paid for my guilt. That means I don't have to pay for it. He was hung for my hang ups. Jesus Christ was nailed to the cross so I can quit nailing myself to the cross. He wants to forgive your past.

He says He wants to cancel every record of all debts you owe -- emotional debts, relational debts, sins. Canceled. How long do you remember a bill that's been paid? I don't remember it at all. Once it's paid, I forget it. I think the point He's saying is this: Once God's forgiven it, I can forget it. That's good news! Even if there were no such thing as a heaven or hell and there is -- but if there weren't it would be worth it to become a Christian just to have a clear conscious, just knowing that I am free from all those things I've done wrong. That's the good news.

Because Jesus is who He said it was, my past can be forgiven. I don't have to go carrying a load of guilt around. It's unnecessary.

*"There is no condemnation awaiting those who belong to Christ."* Those of you who are Baby Boomers, remember when you were growing up you had a Etch-A-Sketch? If you messed up the picture you just flip it, shake it, turn it over. There would be a clean slate. This is God's etch-a-sketch verse in the bible. He says, I want to wipe it clean. You can walk out of here tonight, knowing that every single thing you've ever done wrong up until this point is completely forgiven. That's good news. That's news I can use. No condemnation! Jesus Christ did not come to rub it in, He came to rub it out. He said, *"I didn't come to condemn the world, I came to save it."* He wants to change you, to help you, give you a new beginning, a clear conscious. That's news I can use.

## **2. MY PRESENT PROBLEMS CAN BE MANAGED**

Much of life is unmanageable. Especially if you're a parent! I was reading this week about Charlie Shedd, an author. He tells this story on himself, "Before we had kids I use to travel across the country teaching a lecture I called 'The Ten Commandments for Raising Perfect Kids' before I had kids." After he and Martha had their first child, he changed it 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 the third child he gave up speaking on the topic altogether.

Maturity is when you figure out that you can't have it all figured out. Maturity is when you realize that you can't manage all that life is going to send you. But God can. And that's good news. I can't control everything in my life, but God can. So I want to hook up with Him and let Him control it and ask Him for help.

I talk to hundreds of people all the time and the number one complaint I hear from people today in Orange County is "My life is out of control." I hear it a thousand times. "I feel powerless to

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change the situation... I feel powerless to break a bad habit... I feel powerless to save a relationship... I feel powerless to get out of debt... I feel powerless to manage my time and my schedule." What you need is a power greater than yourself. You were never meant to live this life just on your own power. God wants to have a relationship with you.

Ephesians 1:20 *"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 that God used at resurrection time two thousand 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, next week. I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow and neither do you. But it doesn't matter. Because even though it's out of my control, it's not out of God's. He will give me the power to face it.

Philippians 4:13 *"I'm ready for anything through the strength of Christ who lives in me."* I want to help out, God says. No matter how hopeless your situation is -- some of you came crawling in here tonight. You've had a tough week! God wants to say to you, "Don't give up." No problem is too big for God. No situation is hopeless if you'll turn it over to Him.

"I am ready for anything through the power of positive thinking"? No, it doesn't say that. "I am ready for anything because I psyched myself up." No, *"I'm 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...

### **3. MY FUTURE CAN BE SECURE.**

One of the universal problems we've all got is death. Everybody dies. I'm going to die someday and so are you. Only a fool would go all through life unprepared for something he knows is inevitable. That doesn't make sense. 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. Invite your friends over sometime, serve them some coffee and pie and say, "Let's talk about death." See what happens. But it's inevitable so let's talk about it.

They asked some children to write sentences about what they believed about death. Gilda, age 8, said, "When you die they put you in a box and bury you in the ground because you don't look too good." Stephanie, aged 9, said, "Doctors help you so you won't die until you pay their bill." Marsha, aged 9, said, "When you die, you don't have to do homework in heaven unless your teacher is there too." Raymond, 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, "What's going to happen? What's going to happen after I die?" It's obvious we're going to spend more time on that side of eternity

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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 70 million baby boomers approach middle age, all of a sudden, they're interested in the Hereafter. *U.S. News & World Report* this last week on the cover: "The Rekindling of Hell". More people believe in heaven and hell than ever before in American history. Why? Because people are wondering, "What's going to happen?"

The fact is there are a lot of misconceptions about heaven. Most of them come from bad movies. (The movies can be good but the theology is bad in them.) *Heaven Can Wait*, *Oh, God*, *All Dogs Go To Heaven*, *Defending Your Life* -- they are cute little ideas of what they think heaven is going to be like.

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

One day you're going to stand before God and you're going to need to know the right answers. Here's what the Bible says about the future -- about heaven and hell.

1) 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. It's a perfect place.

2) In order for you to go there you have to be perfect because only perfect can get into heaven. That would leave us all out -- we'd never make it if we had to be perfect. None of us are perfect, we've all messed up.

There are two ways the Bible says you can get to heaven. Plan A is to earn it. That's the performance plan. To earn it you only have to never sin and always do what's right for your entire lifetime. Always make the right decision, always say the right thing, never the wrong thing, be perfect. 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 1000 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. Plan B is you trust Jesus Christ, you establish a relationship to Him when He said, "*I am the way, the truth and the life.*" He was the only perfect person who ever lived because He was God. He came so we could know what God is like. By trusting and establishing a relationship with Him you get in on His goodness.

Ron Dunn took his young son to a carnival one time for his birthday. His son picked six boys to go with him so he bought a roll of tickets. Whenever they came to a ride, he'd pull off seven tickets and give one to each of the boys. He said they got to the Ferris Wheel and he was pulling off one for each kid and there was an eighth little kid there with his hand out. "Who are you?" The boy said, "I'm Johnny. I'm your son's new friend. And he said that you would give me a ticket." Did I give him one? Absolutely.

When you get to heaven you'll say, "God, I couldn't get here on my own effort. The only way I can get into heaven is I'm a friend of Jesus Christ."

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John 17:3 *"This is the way to have eternal life. By knowing the only true God and Jesus Christ the one He sent to earth."* The Bible says that Jesus has already paid for your way to heaven. This is news you can use.

The Christian is not somebody who accepts a religion. A Christian is somebody who has a relationship to God. I'm not talking about a religion, I'm talking about a relationship to God.

A lot of people try different ways to get to heaven. Some people try Salvation by Sincerity. "It doesn't matter what you believe as long as you're sincere." Just think that one through. You can be sincerely wrong. I read the other day about a pilot who sincerely flew into a mountain. He thought it was lower. He killed himself. He was sincerely wrong. I could pick up a glass of water and take a drink of it sincerely thinking it's water and if it's poisoned, I'd be sincerely dead.

There are some people who think you get to heaven by service. I do all these good things and work my way there. That doesn't work.

Some people try Salvation by Subtraction. You give up a bunch of things and then you get to heaven. "I don't drink, smoke, cuss, chew, run around with girls that do." I don't do nothing'. If being a Christian was a matter of not doing things then anybody who's dead qualifies as a Christian. They don't do anything.

Then there are people who think they'll get to heaven by ritual. I'll get baptized. You can get baptized in the ocean until every fish knows you by your first name. Maybe you'll join a church and think that will make you a Christian. Sitting in a church will make you a Christian about as much as sitting in a chicken house will make you a chicken. You say you joined the church. If you joined the Lion's Club does that 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. Your mother was a Christian. Your grandmother was a Christian. So what? You have to make a personal decision yourself. That's like saying, I know you're married because your mother was married and your grandmother and your great grandmother. No, you've got to make a personal decision.

My favorite of all is Salvation by Comparison. "I'm better than ... so and so." You're probably better than me. I don't doubt that. But God isn't judging you according to me or anybody else. Saying "I'm better than Hitler" is like saying "I can bench press more than my grandmother!" God doesn't grade on a curve. It's either perfection or zip! It's either 100% or Plan B -- trust Christ.

Christ said, This is the way to eternal life. 1 Peter 1:3 *"We have been born again into a life full of hope [circle "hope"] through Christ rising from the dead."* Hope means you don't have anything to fear. You don't fear death any moire. You're not ready to live until you're ready to die. You can't really live unless you're not afraid to die. How can you not be afraid to die? By making peace with God now.

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

- 1) Would you like to have every sin, everything you've ever done wrong completely forgiven? Would like to have a clear conscious?
- 2) Would you like to acquire a new power that would help you manage the problems in your present?
- 3) Would you like to have your future secured?

That's the difference that Easter can make. How? Understanding why Easter happened, why Christ rose from the dead and what a difference it made is not enough. You've got to do something about it. You've got to take some action steps. Understanding what I've just talked about is not enough to get you into heaven. You've got to accept it and act on it. You pray and say to God, "God, I'm scrapping Plan A. I know that I'll never earn my way to Heaven. I know I'll never be good enough. I've already blown it enough times to know I'm not going to make the 100% thing. So I'm asking You to work Plan B in my life. Jesus Christ, I want to trust You, follow You, get to know You and have a relationship." That's how Easter makes a difference in your life.

All of us came tonight for many different reasons. Some of you came because it's the thing to do. It's Easter. Traditional. Find a church and go. So you came out of habit. Others of you came maybe because a friend invited you, somebody who really cares about you. Some of you came because of an advertisement and saw something that attracted your attention. It doesn't matter why you think you came here. You're not here by accident. I think God brought you here. I think He brought you here so He could communicate to you, so He could get you to sit still for fifteen minutes so He could say something to you. We get too busy to hear God talk to us.

I think 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? You matter to Me. I want to have a relationship to you. I sent My Son to die for you. I want you to get to know Me."

Your background may be Catholic, or Jewish or Protestant or Mormon or Buddhist or Baptist. I don't care what your background is. I'm not talking about religion. I'm talking about a relationship to Jesus Christ. That's what Easter is all 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 kind of drifted away. God wants to say come back. Some of you have moved here to the Saddleback Valley and you've never found a church home yet. What does God say to somebody who has drifted away? Isaiah 54:7 "*With deep love I will welcome you back.*" Nobody will ever love you as much as Jesus Christ does. You matter to God and He brought you here tonight to tell you that. Jesus Christ died for you to prove how much He loves you.

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

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Prayer:

Some of you are maybe not sure you'd go to heaven if you died. Would you pray something like this in your heart, "Jesus Christ, I'm not sure if I'm saved or not. If I'm 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."

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

Some of you have not found a church home. Saddleback would love to be your spiritual family. We welcome you here. This is a place for imperfect people. The purpose of our church is two fold: 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.

Some are barely hanging on and you've been discouraged, depressed, despondent. The pressure and stress has been building up this past week and month. You feel overwhelmed. I think God brought you here tonight so He could say to you, "Give it all to Me. Let go and let Me work in your life." Would you say, "Jesus Christ, I want to give You these problems I'm facing. And 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.