

– *Alleluia, Christ is Risen! The Lord is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!*

† Two great characters from two great stories

- *Start with stories of characters from two of my all-time favorite movies. YOUR challenge is to figure out what they have in common. They are...*
  - *BUZZ LIGHTYEAR... original Toy Story*
  - *NEO.. original Matrix*
- *FIRST- BUZZ.. something about his character essential to plot of movie... HE WAS INSANE. He really believed he was THE BUZZ LIGHTYEAR. That he could fly. Which, of course, he couldn't!*
- *Then there is NEO. Neo, in fact, COULD FLY! He really was THE ONE. He could dodge bullets! But, for the bulk of the movie, HE DIDN'T BELIEVE IT.*
- *SO... with BUZZ, we see life lesson- it is VERY POSSIBLE to believe something that IS NOT TRUE.*
- *Worked out okay for him until while trying to escape from Sid's house, he LEPT from top of stairs, and learned he could not fly- breaking not only his arm, but his spirit.*
- *Buzz learned that being sincere in your belief isn't enough- that it's possible to be sincerely wrong.*
- *NEO, on the other hand, learned the equally great life lesson that it is possible to NOT BELIEVE something that IS TRUE. Here he was in an impossible battle for the very freedom of mankind, and there was a truth about HIM that could change everything, if he would only see it and believe it! Neo learned that just because you don't believe something, doesn't mean it isn't true!*
- *SO, with Buzz and Neo we see one of the great problems inherent to the human condition...*
  - *We believe things that aren't true*
  - *We fail to believe things that are true*
- *EXAMPLE: I believe coffee is good for me. I DON'T believe that fully loaded bacon, cheddar, jalapeno breakfast bagel is bad for me...*
- *A bit more real... person struggling with issues in life*
  - *May believe life has little value. - seems true, but it's not.*
  - *May NOT believe there is hope for things to change- even though THERE IS...*
- *Time in my life when I BELIEVED I WAS ALL I NEEDED. I DIDN'T BELIEVE GOD HAD ANYTHING I NEEDED.*
- *I was WRONG on both counts, by God's grace I came to discover that I had NOTHING I truly needed, and God offered EVERYTHING I truly needed.*
- *Obvious point...Rather than believing what isn't true, and not believing what is true, WE NEED TO BELIEVE WHAT IS TRUE!*
- *SO... TODAY IS EASTER SUNDAY! Day followers of Jesus around the world, for the past 2000 years, have been celebrating the singular greatest event in human history, the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ, Messiah, SON OF GOD.*

† When it comes to the Hope of Easter, what do you believe to be true?

- *The Theologian AW TOZER put it this way: “What comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us.” (Hold thought)*
- *If you self-identify as a Christian, I’m going to make TWO BIG ASSUMPTIONS about what you believe when you think about God.*
- *You do believe that Jesus really did die, and he really did rise again. He really is GOD. If you don’t believe this, let’s talk. Great evidence.*
- *SECOND.. that you believe that truth about Jesus is found in the Bible, and the Bible is essentially true. Not always sure what this truth MEANS, and we must interpret, wrestle... but bottom line, TRUTH. AND...*

When it comes to the Truth of Scripture, the most important thing about God is the RESURRECTION of Jesus Christ.

- *The Resurrection is THE essential and foundational reality of the Christian faith.*

† The foundation of our faith

- *The resurrection of Jesus proclaims humanities absolute need of God’s GRACE.*
- *Humanity is broken, and it always has been, starting all the way back when Adam and Eve chose pride of self over trust in God. Sin then, the human condition has been dominated by the reality of SIN- and sin is a much bigger thing than just what we would define as morally negative thoughts and actions.*
- *Sin, and the great brokenness that comes from sin, encompasses the totality of fear, suffering, and struggle endemic to the human condition.*
- *ANY honest assessment of history will bear this out- and here’s the key- IN OUR HUMANITY, there is NOTHING we can do about it. No matter how hard we try, we have no power to overcome the reality of our fallen nature. THAT’S THE BAD NEWS. BUT!!!....*
- *The resurrection of Jesus also proclaims that God- through Jesus Christ- took it upon Himself to provide a REMEDY.*
- *A remedy to the disease for which we have no cure. This remedy was the necessary precursor to the Resurrection- it was the CROSS.*
- *By his willing death on the cross, Jesus- the only human to be free of the brokenness of sin- surrendered to BEING BROKEN to pay the debt of humanities separation from, and rebellion against, our creator. This is what scripture proclaims-*

1 Peter 3:18 *For Christ also suffered once for sins, the **righteous** for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.*

Romans 3:22-25 *There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement (total, complete payment), through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith.*

- *THIS IS THE GOOD NEWS! And yet, it turns out that our sin, while it had to be dealt with, is only a symptom of our true problem.*

✠ Our true problem: In the human condition we are spiritually DEAD.

- **GOD is the only source of all life. Now, God has given us PHYSICAL life, consciousness, intelligence, a soul through which we possess a MIND, WILL, and EMOTIONS. BUT APART FROM CHRIST we are separated from God, and have no spiritual life. The result is we are left trying to make life work out of our own wisdom and resources, which ultimately NEVER works, because we are broken!**
- **We have an understanding of God's goodness, we instinctively seek to live up to that Goodness, and yet we are disconnected to the only true SOURCE of that goodness, which is God himself! This is what it means to be spiritually dead.**
- **AND SO it would not have been enough for Jesus just to pay the debt of our sin- He had to overcome DEATH ITSELF. AND HE DID THIS, through the RESURRECTION. As the apostle Paul proclaims in Romans 6...**

...just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.

– **The scripture goes on, saying...**

<sup>5</sup>For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. <sup>6</sup>For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—<sup>7</sup>because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

<sup>8</sup>Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. <sup>9</sup>For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. <sup>10</sup>The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God.

<sup>11</sup>In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

- **IN CHRIST the old has gone, and the NEW HAS COME. THAT IS GOOD NEWS.**
- **BUT HERE'S THE RUB. Just a minute ago I said that through his death and resurrection Jesus provided a REMEDY to the human condition. He made possible a NEW WAY to be human.**
- **SO, WHY- even as believers who have received this new life- why do we so profoundly continue to struggle with sin and brokenness?**
- **THIS IS A HUGE AND IMPORTANT QUESTION! LOTS to talk about there- BUT to paraphrase TOZER- one big reason is that when it comes to WHAT WE BELIEVE when think about God...**
- **We believe something that ISN'T TRUE, and we FAIL to believe something that IS TRUE.**
- **CREDIT TO MY FRIEND Joe Chambers- article he wrote titled "The Deepest Truth"**

✠ What we believe that isn't true

- **When it comes to the nature of God and my relationship to Him, we believe- we are taught- the deepest truth about us is that we are SINNERS.**

- There's a hymn written by Isaac Watts entitled "Alas and did my savior bleed." It was popular for centuries, and in the very first verse it captures Watts- and Christian cultures- concept of our deepest truth in relationship to God...

*Alas! and did my Savior bleed, And did my Sov'reign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head, For such a worm as I?*

- This idea has a name- It's the understanding of God and humanity where the most important reality is that we, as eternal creations of God- in our fundamental identity- are sinners. Therefore, the most important awareness for a believer is a continuing focus on their sin. The name this idea is "Worm Theology".
- As my friend Joe said "I am a worm because I do wormy things"... just as I do, and just as you do.
- To draw an analogy to AA, in this mindset we see ourselves – as our primary identity- as RECOVERING SINNERS. We engage in Christian culture and it's like we come to a group of other Christians and say "Hi, my name is Ethan, and I'm a sinner."
- We saddle ourselves with this self-identifier because we believe that we are always just one sin away from running wild, disappointing God, and in some circles believing we will lose our salvation.
- DON'T HEAR WHAT I'M NOT SAYING! SIN IS A THING! Sin hurts people, it destroys lives- Christ died as the remedy for sin, remember?
- AND YET, is BEING A SINNER THE DEEPEST AND MOST IMPORTANT TRUTH ABOUT ME? IT IS NOT!
- THIS LEADS to what is so hard for us to believe, to accept, BUT IT IS TRUE- it is the miraculous, life giving, and liberating TRUTH OF GOD...

✠ What is so hard for us to believe, but is true!

*In Christ, I am the beloved child of the most high God!*

- In Ephesians 5:1 we are described as DEARLY LOVED CHILDREN. In Colossians 3:12 Paul says...

Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

- Can you say this with me... "I AM GOD'S PRECIOUS CHILD, HOLY AND DEARLY LOVED"
- The Christian poet Macrina Wiederkehr put it this way...  
*O God, help me to believe the truth about myself- no matter how beautiful it is!*
- IN CHRIST, this is the deepest truth about you.

✠ Where everything changes

- FULL CIRCLE.... Back to Buzz. Scene where everything changes for him.

- **BUZZ IS BROKEN- physically and emotionally. In Sid's room, strapped to a rocket. Woody is begging for his help, but Buzz's world as he knew it is gone.**
- **He has finally stopped believing what wasn't true... come to the realization- the truth- that he is a TOY... and he is crushed.**
- **BUT THEN... he looks at his foot- and he realizes his identity as a toy isn't the deepest truth about him. There, written in permanent marker, is a name. ANDY. And Buzz realized the most important thing was not WHO HE WAS, but WHOSE HE WAS. That was his turning point.**
- **FRIENDS! EVEN THOUGH IT CAN HURT, it may fly in the face of what you've always learned and believed. You may have discovered that WHO YOU ARE is weak. You may be in a place of brokenness, where everything you thought was true or would be true of your life has turned out different. You may be wrestling with HUGE questions about your faith...**
- **BUT EVEN SO- perhaps ESPECIALLY if this is where you are...**
- **GOD INVITES US into the reality that the most important thing about us is not that we are sinners. We are broken, but our brokenness doesn't have the final word.**
- **The most important thing about you- the deepest truth and ultimate reality is that IN CHRIST YOU ARE A PRECIOUS AND BELOVED CHILD OF GOD.**
- **Christ suffered the cross, scorning its shame, and He rose again defeating death IN ORDER TO MAKE THIS POSSIBLE, and NOTHING can change it.**
- **In Ephesians 1:5 Paul says that Christ has made us ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED... and this is to the praise of God's Glory and Grace.**
- **END WITH POEM by my friend Joe.**

✠ My Deepest Truth. By Joe Chambers.

Before my first sin  
 Before a single start or  
 A subatomic particle  
 Was ever spoken into being  
 I existed in the mind of God  
 As His Beloved.

Before I was a sinner  
 I was a son- and a daughter.  
 That's the deepest truth about me.  
 Deeper than my sin  
 Is my belovedness

It's the deepest truth about me  
 Because it was the further truth about me  
 And the last.

**As we go from this place into the week, year, and life before us, may this be the lens- the truth- we believe and in which we live**