

✠ **The greatest story ever...**

- ***In April 2003 the Author Dan Brown released his book The DaVinci Code- would go on to be international bestseller. Line in book that sums up Brown's assertion behind the entire story. "WHAT IF the greatest story ever told, was the greatest story ever sold"***
- ***To the extent that Brown was trying to undermine Christianity, his tactic was the same tried by everyone who has ever seriously tried, and that is to DENY the RESURRECTION.***
- ***BECAUSE, THE GREATEST STORY ever told- when that phrase is used, is the GOSPEL. It is the story of Jesus, most specifically the CROSS- the claim that Jesus as GOD, gave his life to pay the debt of humanities sin against God, and LITERALLY was killed, buried, and was raised to life from the dead.***
- ***THE HEART of the entire Christian message, of the New Testament, is the RESURRECTION of Jesus- and if this is NOT TRUE, then all of Christianity falls apart. Paul said this!***

1 Corinthians 15:17-20 *And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. ¹⁸ Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. ¹⁹ If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied. ²⁰ But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead...!*

- ***If Christ has not been raised from the dead, we aren't just left with a morality based religious philosophy called Christianity, that through human manipulation grew to be a world religion. AS PAUL SAID, if Christ isn't raised from the dead, the Christian faith is FUTILE. We are to be PITIED. We have been conned, and the entire christian message, everything it teaches, completely falls apart.***
- ***BUT.. IF Christ IS raised from the dead... if the great claim of EASTER is TRUE... then that's something else altogether. WITHOUT GOING INTO DETAIL...***
 - ***There is tremendous historical, cultural, and sociological evidence for resurrection of Jesus. Not just the claims of the NT***
 - ***Furthermore, if the resurrection was a hoax, as people across the centuries have claimed, it's virtually impossible to explain- from any honest historical/sociological perspective, how Christianity survived the first century.***
- ***GOOD conversation to have... but I want to jump to the assumption that Mark got it right when he recorded the words an angel said to the women at the empty tomb that morning... "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"***
- ***Friends, if true, then the gospel is authenticated. Then there IS a story we need to not just HEAR, but as Jesus was fond of saying... EARS TO HEAR***

✠ **Ears to hear! Do you know the story? Explain/sum up!**

- ***God created the world, and it was GOOD***
- ***Humanity lived in a perfect and personal relationship with God, a relationship defined by DEPENDENCE. Humanity had work, responsibility, and lived with God as the source of LIFE- of meaning, purpose***
- ***Then, there was the event we call the FALL, when sin entered the world, and that relationship was shattered. The essence of this sin was NOT that man chose good over evil- man didn't yet even understand the meaning of Good and Evil- rather the essence of sin was that man chose HIMSELF as his own authority rather than God. THAT'S KEY! In essence, sin isn't a moral choice, it is a choice of WHO IS GOD. In the story we know in***

Genesis, humanity chose itself as God- SPIRITUALLY DIED- and the rest of human history is the indisputable evidence of what happened as a result.

- **THEN, into the history of human suffering, God made a way for this relationship to be restored. As John says in his gospel, THE WORD BECAME FLESH and dwelled among us. Christ- God in human form- came to us, dwelled among us, and showed us what humanity looked like as God intended it.**
- **But we rejected him, and we killed him. AND WHEN JESUS REALLY DIED on that historic cross some 2000 years ago, HE REALLY DID carry with him, take upon himself, the wrath of God for all of our sin.**
- **WHEN JESUS ROSE FROM THE DEAD on the third day, he didn't just defeat death (which he did). He brought with him a GIFT- a gift to be received by FAITH- of a restored relationship with God.**

o **GIFT OF FORGIVENESS**

Romans 4:8 *Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.*

o **Gift of freedom- freedom from condemnation**

Romans 8:1 *Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus*

o **The gift of NEW LIFE**

John 20:31 *But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*

- **Ephesians- when we were dead, Christ made alive**
- **The gift of a life that is restored to God, that has the hope of eternity with God- AND ALSO A LIFE that has purpose, meaning, and FULLNESS- the PRESENCE OF GOD- RIGHT NOW, TODAY**

John 10:10 *The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

- **You see my friends, Jesus is the God of all creation, he is God of all eternity, AND he is the God who is...**

† **Jesus: The God who is present**

- **Here's the problem. We hear this story, the gospel, maybe we accept in our mind that there's truth there. Maybe we believe that there is a God, that He is good, and that we can learn about him in the Bible... but we think he is distant. That this is all something that happened a long time ago to a people far far away- and Jesus isn't here for you, relevant to you**
- **Let me tell you about two of those people long ago, because it turns out they are a lot like you, and just as Jesus was present/relevant to them, he is present and relevant to us.**

• **To people like Thomas John 20:24-29**

- **Thomas knew Jesus, he saw everything he did, but he was a skeptic at heart. A lot like me. Thomas was kind of guy who was all for being a part of something, but he wanted things to be where he could understand them himself, on his terms. I can relate, maybe you can...**
- **Anyway, we are told that when news got back to the disciples that Jesus was alive, that multiple people already had seen him, Thomas refused to believe it.**

"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."

- **About a week goes by, disciples were together again when Jesus appeared in their midst. "PEACE" AMAZING DETAIL- Jesus turns specifically to Thomas- the doubter, the skeptic, and he said**

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."

²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

- **Think of that! Jesus, the God of all creation, came personally to Thomas, the doubter, and he said “THOMAS! SEE ME! Stop doubting and believe!”**
- **Some of us here are people like Thomas. You are close enough to this whole message to see the evidence, but it’s not on your terms, you’re keeping it at arm’s length... Jesus says... BELIEVE!**
- **Praise God that Jesus is present to all of us Thomas’s. But even more amazing, is that Jesus is present to people like MARY.**
- **To people like Mary John 20:11-16**
- **Not Mary mother of Jesus, but Mary Magdalene. Mary has become a unique character with lots of cultural assumptions made about her, but we really only know a few things.**
- **FIRST, came from town called Magdala on the west shore of the Sea of Galilee- it was a fishing village, she likely was from a working class family. The name ‘Magdalene’ means ‘Mary of Magdala’**
- **SECOND, Mary was part of a small group of women who deeply loved Jesus and were among his closest followers. Luke tells us that these women financially supported Jesus in his ministry ‘out of their own means’. Mary was present at the cross, she was with the women who anointed Jesus’ body after he died, she was with the women who went to further embalm Jesus’ body the morning they found the empty tomb.**
- **THIRD-after everyone else (either out of confusion or fear) had left the empty tomb, Mary was the only person remaining when Jesus appeared.**

Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb ¹² and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. ¹³ They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?”

“They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” ¹⁴ At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.

¹⁵ He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.”

- **It’s hard for us to grasp the emotion of this moment. Mary had dedicated every ounce of her life for the past three years to Jesus. Now, because Jesus somehow looked different, or because she simply hadn’t held out any hope to see him again, she didn’t recognize him. THEN, in that moment of her complete brokenness, DON’T MISS THIS... GOD said her name.**

¹⁶ Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!”

- **Think of that! Of all the people Jesus could have appeared to- Peter, John, Pilate!... Jesus first revealed his Resurrection to Mary- and when he did, he called her by name.**
- **There’s one more thing we know about Mary that make this even more unlikely. Luke and Mark both tell us that when Jesus had first met Mary, she was an incredibly spiritually (maybe morally) sick woman. We don’t know any details, but that Jesus had driven seven demons from her. This alone would have made her an outcast, a pariah, a person to be shunned- disqualified from any significance. AND YET, TO THIS LEAST OF WOMEN, Jesus stepped out of the tomb, just having defeated humanities greatest enemy- death itself- and he called her by name.**
- **Friends, when Jesus rose from the dead, he did so bearing the gift of NEW LIFE restored to God. This gift is for all of us... people like Thomas... people like Mary... and it is for people like you. IT’S FOR YOU.**

† **It's for you!**

- *Have you received Jesus gift? It's not complicated, it's not about getting religious- it's about opening your heart to see what is TRUE, and to choose to receive that Gift.*
- *In Romans 9- "Declare with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved"*
- *Jesus is present- and he is saying your name. Do you have ears to hear... listen! "ITS FOR YOU..."*