

# Jesus Wins: Easter Sunday 2026

1 Corinthians 15:3-4

4/4/2026

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## ANNOUNCE:

Joan Hughes passed away at 92, a founding member. More alive today than ever before.

Tom gives his thanks for all the prayers for the incident he suffered last Sunday. We are glad he's doing better and with us again.

## Intro

We gather on this beautiful Easter morning and make a bold, definitive claim—Jesus rose, and Jesus wins. Not that He might win, not that He is trying to win, not even that He will win someday—but that through His death and resurrection, the victory over sin, death, and Satan has already been accomplished, secured, and sealed.

And yet, we will leave this place today and walk back into a world that does not always feel like a victory.

We still see the effects of a fallen world pressing in on every side. We still walk through seasons where the diagnosis comes back the way we feared. We still sit in rooms where grief is not theoretical, but personal. We still wrestle through broken relationships, injustice, and the slow wear of living in bodies that were never meant to last forever. And somewhere in that tension, the question begins to surface—not as rebellion, but as honest observation:

## Quote

— *Question*

If Christ has already won, why does it still feel like we are living in the middle of a battle?

That question is not a threat to faith; it is often the doorway to a deeper one. Because Scripture does not ignore that tension—it explains it.

## Scripture

1 Peter 1:3-5 (NKJV) [3] Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, [4] to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, [5] who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

That means the victory of Christ is not partial or fragile, as though there were anything that could shake or dismantle it. It does not rise and fall with our circumstances. It stands completely outside of them.

And yet, 1 Corinthians 15:25–26 tells us that Christ is reigning until every enemy is placed under His feet, and the last enemy to be destroyed is death. And Hebrews 2:8 says it plainly—we see that all things have been put under Him... but we do not yet see all things put under Him.

That is where we live.

Not in the fog of a battle whose outcome is still in question, but on the winning side of a war that has already been decided. The smoke hasn't cleared yet, but the Victor has already walked off the field.

## Custom

And that begins to answer the questions that press on us. Why does pain still exist? Why does sickness still take its toll? Why does evil still seem active in a world where Christ has triumphed?

First, because defeated enemies still resist.

They have lost their authority, but they have not yet been removed. They can still wound, but they cannot ultimately win. They can still create moments of real suffering, but they cannot alter the final outcome that was sealed when Christ walked out of the grave.

Second, because God is still seeking sinners.

Also consider if Christ were to immediately remove every trace of brokenness—if every wrong were instantly judged, every sorrow erased—that would also mean the window for repentance closes. What we often interpret as delay is actually God's patience, holding the door of eternal salvation open a little longer.

Third, this fallen world is not our home.

If this world were suddenly made painless and complete, how quickly would our hearts settle here, in this place that is less than what God intends for us? How quickly would we stop longing for eternity because we had become comfortable with what is temporary? This world was never meant to satisfy us fully... that's the tension we feel between what is and what we know it should be. CS Lewis wisely wrote:

## Quote

— C.S. Lewis

"If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

Church, the ache you feel in this life is not a sign that God has forgotten you. It is a compass. And every compass points somewhere... and this one points straight to the resurrection.

So the question is not whether Jesus has won. The question is how we live in the space and time between what has been accomplished and what has not yet been fully realized. And the answer Scripture gives is not denial, and it is not pretending that suffering isn't real. The answer is faith—anchored, not in what we can see right in front of us, but in what God has already done behind us.

We look back to a real moment in history, an empty garden tomb, and we allow that moment to define everything that comes after it. Because the resurrection of Jesus Christ was not a step toward potential victory, it was the declaration that victory has been decided.

This means what we are experiencing now is not a fight to determine the outcome, but rather a struggle that takes place in light of an outcome already secured. Before a Roman soldier was ever posted at that tomb, before the stone was ever cut or the seal ever placed, God had already written the last line of the story. And it reads: He is risen. Death could not hold him, man could not destroy Him, Satan could not defeat Him!

And if that is true—if Jesus has truly won—then the question we have to ask next is this:

Was this always the plan?

Because what we are about to see is that the resurrection is not an isolated event in Scripture. It is a pattern. It is a thread. It is a story God has been telling from the very beginning.

And once you see it, you realize Easter Sunday wasn't the surprise, and defeat was never an option. Paul, speaking about the resurrection, frames it in an interesting way:

## Scripture

1 Corinthians 15:4 - ...that He (Jesus) was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures.

The death and resurrection of Jesus was a surprise and an improvisation. It all happened "According to the Scriptures." This was the plan. Let me show you how far back that plan goes.

## Main Point

### Point 1

The Pattern of the Resurrection - It Was Always God's Plan

Life from death runs through every page of Scripture

God has always been in the business of calling life out of death. The resurrection pattern is not unique to Easter morning; it runs through every major act of the biblical story. Easter Sunday wasn't a plot twist. It was the plot all along.

Watch what God does, again and again, as he wrote the story:

Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22 / Hebrews 11:17-19)

Abraham raises the knife over his own son, the son of promise that through his seed he would become a great nation, more than the stars in the heavens. At the final moment, God stops him. A ram appears in the thicket; a divine provision for sacrifice. The son lives because another takes his place.

Hebrews 11 tells us Abraham believed God could raise Isaac from the dead, and he received him back "in a figurative sense"; a living parable. This was a preview of God, providing Himself a perfect sacrifice. Two thousand years later, another Father's Son would climb a hill carrying wood on His back — and this time, there would be no last-minute substitute. Because He was the substitute. But just as Abraham believed God would raise the son of promise, Jesus knew Psalm 16:

## Scripture

Psalm 16:10 (NKJV) [10] For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

Aaron's Rod (Numbers 17 / Hebrews 9:4)

A dead stick. Cut off from its tree. No root, no water, no soil — no reason to produce anything ever again. And yet God told Moses to place the rods of each tribal leader before the ark overnight, and by morning, Aaron's rod had budded, blossomed, and produced ripe almonds. Life from dead wood overnight, by the power of God alone!

But here's the detail you don't want to miss: that rod was placed inside the ark of the covenant, next to the tablets of the Law (Hebrews 9:4). Life from dead wood, preserved beside the very Law of God. Centuries later, the Son of God would be lifted up on wood of death, the cross, fulfilling every demand of that Law, and bringing life out of what looked like death. The rod was a preview. The cross was the fulfillment.

#### Joseph (Genesis 37-50)

The prized son, thrown into a pit. Sold for silver by the people who should have been loyal to him (Sound familiar? Judas?). Falsely accused. Buried, as it were, in prison. And then, he rose to the right hand of the throne, to save his people and many people alive. You can't read Genesis 37-50 after Easter Sunday and miss what God was doing.

#### The Passover Lamb (Exodus 12)

Fast forward to the deliverance of God's people from the hand of Egyptian slavery. Death passes over every household covered by the blood of a lamb. A lamb dies so the firstborn lives. The pattern is unmistakable.

#### Jonah (Jonah 1-2 / Matthew 12:40)

Three days in the deep pit of the great fish. Jesus Himself pointed to Jonah and said, "That's the sign I'm going to give you." God was writing the preview of the resurrection centuries in advance.

#### The Valley of Dry Bones (Ezekiel 37)

God asks the prophet, "Can these bones live?" And then He answers His own question by breathing life into what is utterly, completely, unmistakably dead. The answer was always yes.

None of this is coincidence stacked on coincidence. This is an Author leaving fingerprints all over His own story. From creation to the prophets, God was writing one narrative, and it has always moved toward an empty tomb.

## Quote

— Joel B. Green

"The light of the resurrection casts its 'back shadow' on previous events — the resurrection serves as the hermeneutical key by which the past is interpreted as having contained signs pointing to what has now begun to unfold."

In other words, God wasn't improvising. He was illustrating. Over and over again, in the lives of real people, He was showing us what He was about to do.

From Genesis to Malachi, God was writing one story. And it ends with an empty grave.

## Main Point

### Point 2

The Paradox of the Resurrection - Defeat was actually Victory

What Hell celebrated on Friday was its own destruction. (Illustration of hell week in Water Polo)  
The cross was not the place Jesus lost, though that's how it may have appeared in the moment. It was the place Jesus won. But to feel the weight of Sunday, you have to be willing to sit in Saturday for a moment.

Theologians call it Holy Saturday. I call it Sad Saturday.

The disciples have scattered. Peter is somewhere weeping in regret over a fire he never should have stood near and words he never should have said. The women are quietly preparing spices for a body they fully expect to stay dead. The religious leaders are satisfied — the threat has been neutralized. Rome has moved on to the next thing. And from every conceivable angle, it looks like hell won and God lost.

But it isn't just a historical moment. It is a human one.

### Application

Some of you know exactly what Sad Saturday feels like, not in a tomb outside Jerusalem, but in your own life. The diagnosis came back wrong. The marriage didn't make it. The prodigal still hasn't come home. The dream you believed God gave you is sitting in a grave, and nobody seems to be doing anything about it. You are in Saturday. The in-between. The place where hope feels past tense and fear a despair feels like the taskmasters who are calling every next shot.

And I want you to hear what God says to Saturday people.

Because here is what nobody in that story on Saturday knew — what the disciples didn't know, what the religious leaders didn't know, what Hell itself did not know. God prepared it all beforehand:

### Scripture

Acts 2:23 (NKJV) [23] Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death;

### Scripture

Revelation 13:8 (NKJV) ...Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Before the first sin was ever committed, the solution was already written. Before Adam ever fell, Jesus was already the answer. The cross was not a crisis that required a response, it was a plan that required a tomb. And a tomb that could not hold Him.

And then Isaiah 53:10 says something that should stop us in our tracks:

## Scripture

Isaiah 53:10 (NKJV) [10] Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand.

Sit with that word — pleased. It sounds sadistic at first glance. What pleasure could be derived from watching your son innocently suffer and punishing him for another's actions? The Father's pleasure was somehow wrapped up in what looked, from the outside, like total abandonment.

But make no doubt about it, God was not watching the cross as a tragedy unfolding or a joyful occasion to hurt His Son. He was initiating, with His Son, the execution of the greatest rescue mission in the history of eternity. This was a strategic front-line attack on the powers of Hell that would end in victory. The pleasure was not in the death of His Son, but in what the death of the Son would bring about: Seeing his seed, prolonging His days, and prospering in His hand.

What looked like God's worst moment was actually God's greatest strategy.

And then Sunday came.

The same disciples who scattered in fear walked out of that upper room, willing to die for what they had seen. Peter — who wept at a servant girl's question — stood up in Jerusalem and preached to thousands. The women who came to anoint a body went running to tell the world it was gone. Every single one of them was transformed not by a philosophy, not by a movement, not by a memory, but by an encounter with a risen Jesus.

Despair became hope. Fear became courage. Helplessness became the kind of empowerment that turned the Roman world, and the entire world ever since, upside down.

That is what the resurrection does...

It does not erase the Saturday. It redeems it and shows us that God has a plan that we can't always see.

## Main Point

### Point 3

The Proof of the Resurrection - Jesus Is Uniquely Verified

Every other religion follows a teacher. Christianity follows a risen King.

Christianity is not a philosophy. It is not a moral framework. It is not the teachings of a great man. It is a claim about a historical event, and that event either happened or it didn't. If it didn't happen, we are all wasting our time; if it did, there's a whole world of people wasting their lives and eternities.

Think about the great religions of the world. Islam follows the teachings of Muhammad. Buddhism follows the philosophy of the Buddha. Confucianism follows the wisdom of Confucius. Each of those founders is still in a grave somewhere. Their followers carry on their ideas.

Christianity makes a different claim entirely. We don't just follow the teachings of Jesus, though obviously we should. We follow a risen Jesus. And the resurrection verifies every single claim He ever made.

So what is the evidence?

More than I can give today, but Paul makes an excellent legal case. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 15, essentially writes a first-century legal brief. He names specific witnesses, lists appearances, and says "go ask them, many of them are still alive." This is not storytelling. This is a falsifiable public claim made to an audience that included skeptics and enemies.

## Scripture

1 Corinthians 15:5-8 (NKJV) [5] and that He (the risen Jesus) was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. [6] After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. [7] After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. [8] Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time.

Over five hundred eyewitnesses. And Paul's point is essentially — go check. This is a verifiable claim, not a private spiritual experience.

Chuck Colson, who went to prison over Watergate and later had a radical conversion to Christ, put it this way:

## Quote

— *Chuck Colson*

"I know the resurrection is a fact, and Watergate proved it to me. How? Because 12 men testified they had seen Jesus raised from the dead, then they proclaimed that truth for 40 years, never once denying it. Every one was beaten, tortured, stoned and put in prison. Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world -- and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks. You're telling me 12 apostles could keep a lie for 40 years? Absolutely impossible."

Men do not willingly die for what they know to be a lie. They die for what they believe to be true. But the disciples didn't just believe it in theory, they had seen it with their own eyes. And not one of them, under torture, imprisonment, or execution, ever recanted.

Even scholars outside the faith acknowledge the weight of this. E.P. Sanders, a New Testament historian with no theological axe to grind, wrote that the early followers

## Quote

— E.P. Sanders

“...experienced what they described as the 'resurrection': the appearance of a living but transformed person who had actually died. They believed this, they lived it, and they died for it.”

## Application

But here is what I find remarkable, and what makes this historical reality personal: When you look at the Easter accounts, everyone who encountered the risen Jesus came to faith differently. Peter and John saw the empty tomb and believed: faith through conviction. Mary thought someone had stolen the body until she heard her name from the savior's lips: faith through encounter. Thomas needed to see and touch: faith through evidence. The disciples on the road to Emmaus had their hearts burn within them as Scripture was opened: faith through understanding God's Word. Four different people. Four different entry points. One risen Jesus. Which one are you? God didn't require them all to arrive the same way. And He doesn't require that of you either. He met each of them exactly where they were. He still does.

## Main Point

### Point 4

The Power of the Resurrection - We Fight From Victory, Not For It

The battle is real. But it's fought on already-conquered ground.

The resurrection is not just a past event to celebrate or a future hope to anticipate. Paul makes clear that it is a present reality to live in:

## Scripture

Romans 6:4 (NKJV) [4] Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

## Scripture

Romans 8:11 (NKJV) [11] But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you.

The same power that rolled the stone away, that called a dead man back to life, lives inside every believer. Resurrection power is not stored somewhere for future use. It's currently active. Present. Now.

And Colossians 2:15 tells us what that power accomplished:

## Scripture

Colossians 2:15 (NKJV) [15] Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

So what does that actually look like in real life?

Paul is the clearest answer. After his encounter with the risen Jesus on the Damascus road, his life by every earthly measure got harder. He embraced the path of Jesus, the Christ modeled: He embraced service, surrender and sacrifice, but did it all while walking in resurrection power.

Beaten. Shipwrecked. Imprisoned. Abandoned. That doesn't sound like a victory lap. But listen to how Paul describes it from inside those circumstances:

## Scripture

2 Corinthians 4:8-9 (NKJV) [8] We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; [9] persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—

Notice what Paul doesn't say. He doesn't say the pressure isn't real. He doesn't say the confusion went away. He doesn't say life stopped hurting. He says, "The pain doesn't get the final word. Because the same Spirit that raised Jesus is working in me."

## Illustration

Think of it this way: a bird inside a prison still sees the bars. It still may feel confined. But it is not bound by the prison the way the prisoner is, because it was made for something the prison cannot contain. Those who know the risen Jesus still walk through the pain and limitations of this life. But they are no longer defined, destroyed, or dominated by them.

That is the difference resurrection makes. Not the absence of the battle but a completely different reality inside it.

## Main Point

### Point 5

The Promise of the Resurrection - The King is Coming Again

Job wrote these words roughly 1,500 years before Jesus ever walked out of a tomb:

### Scripture

Job 19:25-27 (NKJV) [25] For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth; [26] And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, That in my flesh I shall see God, [27] Whom I shall see for myself, And my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!

He didn't fully understand what he was saying. But God did. And in Christ, it has radically come to pass. Our Redeemer does live. He will stand on this earth again. And He is coming back — not as a humble baby in a manger, but as a conquering King to claim what is rightfully His.

Paul told the Athenians plainly: God "has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained — and He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." (Acts 17:31)

The resurrection is God's public guarantee that history is moving toward a conclusion — and Jesus is that conclusion.

### Illustration

I read about a woman who, while dying, wrote her own obituary. One line went viral. She wrote: "I was born, I blinked, and it was over." That's all any of us get. A blink that we call a life. The question is what you do with Jesus in that blink.

And Jesus Himself gave us the clearest invitation. Standing in front of a grieving woman who had just lost her brother, He didn't offer her a theology lecture. He made a personal claim:

### Scripture

John 11:25-26 (NKJV) [25] Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. [26] And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

That question is still hanging in the air this morning. Do you believe this? And then Revelation gives us the final word on who is asking. Jesus speaks:

## Scripture

Revelation 1:17-18 (NKJV) ...“Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. [18] I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death.”

He has the keys. Death doesn't get the last word — He does. So let me tell you what Easter is not. It is not a memorial for a man who tried. It is not a religious holiday we observe out of tradition. It is not even primarily about the empty tomb — it is about the living King who walked out of it.

### Invitation

For those of you who don't yet know Him — this King is alive and He is inviting. His empty tomb is His credential, and the proof that He is coming again. He meets you exactly where you are: in your doubt like Thomas, in your grief like Mary, in your questions like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. You don't have to have it all figured out. You just have to come. Repent of your sin and going your own way, and submit your life and eternity to the one who overcame death.

For those of you who do know Him — you are not fighting for a victory that might happen someday. You are standing in one that already happened. Live like it. Hope like it. Fight like it. And when the Saturday moments come — and they will come — remember: Sunday was always God's plan.