**Easter Message 2018**

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**Is There Really A Resurrection?**

* In an interview with Pope Francis, published in *La Repubblica* on March 28th . . . only **4 days ago** . . . the Pope is quoted as **denying the existence of hell**.
	+ In the *La Repubblica* article, the Pope’s long-time friend, atheist Eugenio Scalfari, is quoted as asking of the Pope, “you have spoken to me of good souls being admitted to the contemplation of God. But what about bad souls? Where are they punished?"

* + To this direct question, the Pope then responds, "**They are not punished**. Those who repent obtain the forgiveness of God and enter the rank of souls who contemplate him, but **those who do not repent and cannot therefore be forgiven disappear.** **There is no hell, there is the disappearance of sinful souls**."
* This quote is from the religious leader of over a billion people who profess to believe the Bible to be the word of God. But in this quote of Pope Francis we have a very frank confession that this pope either doesn’t know what the Bible teaches, or he doesn’t believe it. I suspect the latter to be the answer.
* The problem with what Pope Francis believes, according to this reliable quote, is that he is **inconsistent in what he believes.**
	+ According to the quote I just read, the pope believes that **believers are resurrected, but unbelievers merely experience annihilation . . . they simply cease to exist . . . after this earthly life.**
	+ Now, if the pope believes in the resurrection of believers . . . a doctrine taught in Scripture . . . why does he not believe in the resurrection of unbelievers . . . which is also taught in Scripture?
		- The answer is, simply, because the truth that God will resurrect unbelievers to face judgment is a harsh and unpleasant reality.
		- And, unfortunately, the misguided belief of Pope Francis is merely an influential man giving voice to what most men believe . . . that a loving God would never send anyone to hell.
		- And the reason for this misguided belief is the all-too-human view that **man is basically good . . . we just do bad things**. And since men like Pope Francis believe that man is basically good, **they believe that** **unbelievers don’t deserve to suffer punishment for their unbelief.**
* Pope Francis has, perhaps unwittingly, provided what is perceived to be a legitimate voice to the beliefs of people who don’t believe what Scripture teaches.
	+ Just as a great many professing Christians believe that abortion is “a woman’s right to choose” and not murder, so a great many Christians now hold up the words of the religious leader of over a billion people who says that there is no hell or eternal punishment.
* As we come together this Resurrection Sunday, we who believe that Scripture is the infallible word of God are gathered to celebrate the most significant event in human history . . . the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death.
	+ The reason the resurrection of the Lord is so important is because our own resurrection to eternal life is based upon the Lord’s resurrection.
		- **If the Lord Jesus has been resurrected** . . . as He promised He would be and as God’s word declares . . . **then we have the assurance that His promise of our own being raised to eternal life is assured.**
		- **But if the Lord Jesus has not been resurrected** . . . contrary to the Lord’s promise . . . **then we have very good reason to doubt the assurance of our own ultimate resurrection to eternal life.**
* But not only do we, believers, know that our belief in the resurrection of the Lord is the basis of our belief in our own resurrection to eternal life, but we also know from Scripture that **even** **those who do not believe in the resurrection of the Lord will also be resurrected.**
* **You see, contrary to what Pope Francis and billions of other people believe, every single person who has ever been created will be resurrected after they die.** As the writer to the Hebrews states . . .

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***Hebrews 9:27— it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment***

* + In this verse . . . and others that I will cite . . . we are told, explicitly, that **just as every one of us lives out our physical lives here on earth, after this life is over, we will all face the judgment of God for the lives we have lived.**
* If it is true that every created human will be resurrected . . . then the only question that remains is, **what will happen to me when I am resurrected and face God?**
	+ In other words, **when I am resurrected, what will I be resurrected to?**
	+ From Scripture, the answer to that questionis that **all men will be resurrected to one of two conditions . . . eternal life or eternal death.**
	+ Contrary to what Pope Francis wishfully thinks, **even unbelievers will experience resurrection**.
* The subject of **resurrection** is a subject that most people are **somewhat familiar with**, but one which most Christians are **not very knowledgeable about**.
* Interestingly, there is no Hebrew term for **resurrection** found in the Old Testament. In fact, there is very little teaching on the **resurrection.**
	+ But while there is no term for **resurrection** found in the Old Testament, the concept of **“rising from the dead”** is taught. Despite the fact that there is very little doctrinal Old Testament teaching on the resurrection, the Jews did believe that after death that their bodies would be raised to new life. In Job 19 we read . . .

***Job 19:25-27— 25 "As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth. 26 Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; 27 Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another. My heart faints within me!***

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* + Later, in Isaiah 26:19, the Lord further reveals the concept of **“rising from the dead”** through the prophet . . .

***Isaiah 26:19— Your dead will live; their corpses will rise. You who lie in the dust, awake and shout for joy, for your dew is as the dew of the dawn, and the earth will give birth to the departed spirits.***

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* + But the most definitive teaching on the resurrection is found in Daniel 12:2, in which God reveals through Daniel . . .
	+ ***Daniel 12:2— "Many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”***

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* + Here in Daniel 12:2 we are introduced to the concept of resurrection judgment.

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**The First Resurrection—Jesus Christ**

* But it is not until you get to the New Testament that you encounter definitive teaching on the resurrection. And it is in the study of the New Testament that we learn that **there are multiple resurrections that occur.**
* While the concept of resurrection is found back in the Old Testament, we don’t actually learn of anyone being resurrected until we come to the gospel accounts of the resurrection of Jesus. In Matthew 28:1-7 we read of **the very first resurrection . . .** the Lord’s resurrection . . .

***Matthew 28:1-7— 1 Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. 2 And behold, a severe earthquake had occurred, for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled away the stone and sat upon it. 3 And his appearance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. 4 The guards shook for fear of him and became like dead men. 5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; for I know that you are looking for Jesus who has been crucified. 6 "He is not here, for He has risen, just as He said. Come, see the place where He was lying. 7 "Go quickly and tell His disciples that He has risen from the dead; and behold, He is going ahead of you into Galilee, there you will see Him; behold, I have told you."***

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* + Here in the gospel account of the events on that Resurrection Sunday, 2000 years ago, we have the account of **the very first resurrection**.
	+ Prior to the resurrection of the Lord no one had ever been raised **to new, eternal life**.
		- Yes, there are many accounts of people being raised from the dead to **resume** their earthly lives, such as Lazarus. But the purpose of these events was to demonstrate the power of God over life and death and to give physical, mortal life back to those who had died.
		- But people who were raised from the dead prior to the resurrection of Jesus continued to live mortal lives here on earth and ultimately died.
		- But with true resurrection, after our natural, earthly lives, our new resurrected selves will never again experience death.
* Just as Adam was the first man to sin, so Jesus was the first man to be resurrected. Paul states this fact in 1 Corinthians 15:21-22 . . .

***1 Corinthians 15:21-22— 21 For since by a man came death, by a man also came the resurrection of the dead. 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive.***

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* + In this passage we are reminded that just as Adam was the cause of mankind’s fall from grace, Jesus Christ . . . the second Adam . . . is the cause of our restoration to grace.
	+ And the means by which this return to a state of grace is possible is by the atoning sacrifice and resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

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**The Second Resurrection—Believers**

* The **second resurrection** found in Scripture is that of **believers** . . . those people, from every generation, who received saving faith.
	+ Now, within this group of **believers** we have several different groups.
		- First, we have the **Old Testament saints . . . those who received saving faith before Christ came.**
		- Second, we have the **Church age saints . . . those who received faith in Jesus Christ after His resurrection, but before end of the church age.**
		- And third, we have the **Tribulation saints . . . those believers who will receive faith during the Tribulation.**
	+ The timing of these 3 groups being resurrected to eternal life is not the subject of my message today and would require more time to explain and show in Scripture than I have today.
	+ My point here in my message this morning is that **all believers . . . from all time . . . will be resurrected to eternal life.**
	+ In Revelation 20:4-6 we see this culmination of redemptive history described, at the end of the Tribulation . . .

***Revelation 20:4-6—4 Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. 5 The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years.***

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* + Notice here in Revelation 20:5 that the resurrection of believers is referred to as ***the first resurrection***. This means that believers are the first people, after Christ, to be resurrected.
	+ While we are looking at Revelation 20 here I want to point out a phrase that will be important when I next talk about the resurrection of unbelievers. Notice in Revelation 20:6, in reference to the resurrection of believers, that John writes that ***blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power . . . .***

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* + - The phrase ***the second death*** is a phrase that refers to the fate of unbelievers who are resurrected to judgment, which we will look at now . . .

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**The Third Resurrection—Unbelievers**

* The **third resurrection** we find in Scripture is **the resurrection of unbelievers**. We find this resurrection described in Revelation 20:11-15, which occurs at the end of the Millennium . . .

***Revelation 20:12-15— 12 And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. 13 And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. 14 And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15 And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.***

* + Notice here in this passage that those who are judged at **the Great White Throne judgment** are only unbelievers . . . whom John identifies as ***whosoever was not found written in the book of life***.
		- In Scripture, ***the book of life*** is a phrase that refers to believers. Only the names of believers are found in ***the book of life***.
		- The implication being, ***whosoever was not found written in the book of life*** is a reference to **unbelievers**.
	+ And notice what is described as happening to those **whose names were *not found written in the book of life*** . . .
		- They experience ***the second death***, which is stated in v. 15 as resulting in them being ***cast into the lake of fire***.

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* I take no pleasure in teaching that unbelievers will be ***cast into the lake of fire***. In fact, the thought terrifies me.
	+ To know that people I know and love will die in unbelief and be consigned to this fate is almost unthinkably frightening.
	+ So when I hear things like what Pope Francis said this past week . . . that unbelievers simply cease to exist after they die . . . I get angry.
	+ I get angry because this lie is one of the worst, most devastating lies possible. To tell a person who is in danger of eternal condemnation that such teaching isn’t true is probably the most hateful disservice a person can inflict upon another person.
	+ Thinking that he was rendering some comfort to his atheist friend, Pope Francis committed the most hateful injury possible. He comforted his friend with the hateful lie that “despite the fact that you spit in God’s face by rejecting His Son as your Savior, you won’t suffer God’s wrath when you die.”
	+ Compare this “Judas kiss” of the Pope to the words of Christ in John 5:28-29 . . .
	+ ***John 5:28-29—28 "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, 29 and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment.***

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* + Based upon this statement by the Lord, Pope Francis is declaring Jesus to be guilty of being either an outright liar, or guilty of a gross over-exaggeration.
* There are a great many people who have heard the gospel message and the warning of Scripture concerning the ultimate fate of those who die in unbelief.
	+ Most of the people who have heard this message and rejected it are of the opinion that, in the end, the things that God threatens upon unbelievers will not happen . . . that God will relent and be merciful.

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**My questions for unbelievers**

* But my question for those, like Pope Francis, who don’t believe in God’s eternal punishment is . . . “you are gambling your eternal fate on your personal belief that there is no eternal punishment. **What if you’re wrong? What if God’s word is true? Are you willing to risk everything** . . . for all eternity . . . on your personal “hunch” that God won’t do what He has warned He will do? Are you really willing to go “all in” and hope that God . . . who cannot lie . . . is bluffing?”
	+ **If there is even the slightest doubt** in your mind about whether God’s word is true, don’t you think it is worth your serious investigation to determine if these things just might be true?
* This morning we are gathered here to celebrate the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. And the fact that Jesus was raised from the dead is important for several reasons.

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**Why is the resurrection of Jesus important?**

* **First**, the resurrection of Jesus is important because the fact that Jesus was resurrected **testifies to the veracity . . . the truthfulness . . . of Scripture.** As Paul so eloquently states in 1 Corinthians 15:13-19 . . .

***1 Corinthians 15:13-19— 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.***

* + If Jesus has not been resurrected, then Jesus is a liar, Paul is a false teacher, Christianity is a false religion, and ***we are of all men most to be pitied*** because we have been duped into believing this false religion.
* **Second,** the resurrection of Jesus is important because the resurrection is **evidence that God the Father was satisfied with the sacrifice that Jesus made.**

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* **Third,** the resurrection of Jesus is important because the resurrection of Jesus Christ is the **confirmation of the finished work of Christ on our behalf.**

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* **Fourth**, the resurrection of Jesus is important because . . . **the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees our own resurrection.**

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* **Fifth**, the resurrection of Jesus is important because **the resurrection demonstrates the power and authority of Jesus Christ over death.**

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* + **The death of Jesus Christ and the raising of Him from the dead were events that were under the complete control and authority of God . . . not men**. We see this in the Lord’s own words, in John 10:17-18 . . .

***John 10:17-18— 17 . . . I lay down My life so that I may take it again. 18 No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again . . . .***

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* It was the eternal plan of God that Jesus Christ would suffer and die in the way that He did. Of all the possible ways that God could have devised to reconcile men to Himself, this was the manner which He decided would glorify Him most.
* This morning we celebrate the triumph of the Lord over the power of sin and death. By His death, He paid the penalty for our sin. And by His resurrection we have confirmation that God the Father has accepted His sacrifice on our behalf. **Christ lives! And because He lives, we have the promise of eternal life.**
* It is with the knowledge of His sacrifice and the belief that God has raised Him from the dead that we now come to The Lord’s Table to **remember and celebrate the new life that we have received in Him.**

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**Closing Prayer**

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