

Series: **SHOCKWAVES!** March 16, 2008

PLEASE TELL ME I'M NOT CRAZY!
1 Corinthians 15:58

I. INTRO

A. Has anyone here seen *The Bucket List*, with Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman? It's a really cool film about two guys who are usually worlds apart, but end up in the same hospital room for chemotherapy. When they find out that they're both dying of cancer, they come up with the *Bucket List*--the list of things they'd like to do before they kick the bucket. Things like sky-diving, driving a race car, seeing the pyramids, kissing the most beautiful girl in the world, doing something really good for someone who can never repay you.

1. So, what I want to do this morning is ask you to come up with a brief **bucket list**. Maybe this is a little morbid—but write down three things you'd like to do or accomplish before you kick the bucket.
2. Anyone feel like sharing one of the things on their list? Hold onto that list cause we're going to look at it again.

B. Today, the day Christians call **Palm Sunday**, celebrates the day Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey and got a king's welcome. Thousands lined the streets, waved palm branches and chanted, "Save us, son of David!" Jesus enemies were saying; "It's all over for us! The Nazarene won—we lost!"

1. But for Jesus' disciples, this incredible day—and it **was** an amazing day--would've **definitely** been on their **bucket list**. They had invested **everything** in following Jesus—and it would seem that this was the payoff for all that they'd been through. **Finally—their leader is getting the recognition He deserves!**

-Because we've read ahead in the story, we know it doesn't last. By the end of the week, Jesus—the hero of the day--rejected, mocked, beaten and crucified. People would think, "another Messiah wannabe bites the dust." But for his **disciples?** Man! It was like **they** died. Everything they'd believed in and hoped for was **gone!** Just like that!

2. Looking back in time, we have perspective. We now know that as dark as Friday and Saturday were—Sunday was Easter! blew the top off of everything. But the disciples had no idea. A lot of things in our lives are just like that. We're in this awful moment—frozen in time—where all we've ever hoped for seems to shrivel and die. And it doesn't make **any** sense.

-A leader in the early church, Paul--who actually saw Jesus after he had risen from the dead, tells us that the resurrection is **real**. Not just for Jesus—but for us. That in an "**Eat, drink and be merry—for tomorrow we die**" world—we need to live for more. And he says these words:

So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless. (1 Corinthians 15:58 NLT)

3. And now we have to decide—is he says true? True enough to stake your life on—like—***bet everything on it?***

II. THE ARC, THE WALL, AND...?

- A. Jesus once said that the proof that everything He said was true was the fact that He would die and be resurrected three days later. He staked ***everything*** on that single event. And it's true--without the resurrection, His teaching becomes just more rhetoric from a great moral leader and his death becomes one more tragic example of Roman cruelty and oppression.

-To put it simply—death wins. Death is the final curtain call—this wall beyond which only mystery exists. If you want life to make sense, it has to make sense on **this** side of that curtain.

-Here's the question. What if Jesus' life ***had*** ended with big parade, and then a grave marker—and a dash between the dates?

1. We know very little about his life before his public ministry. He was born with a great deal of promise and angelic activity—but pretty much disappears into poverty and obscurity in a tiny town called Nazareth in the backwoods of Israel. He spent the majority of his life there—working as a carpenter.
2. Jesus appears out of nowhere at a baptism being held by his relative, John. From that moment on—there's this exponential curve to his life—up and to the right. Multiple, spectacular healings. Miracles that ***no one*** had ever done before. Teaching that captured the hearts of people—people who would never consider themselves even remotely religious.
-What ***really*** made Jesus stand apart from the others, though, was what He said about Himself. That he could forgive sin, that He was the Good Shepherd David had spoken of; that he was the only way to God—and the judge of the world. Of course, He capped it off by claiming to be God.
3. Jesus' life and claims triggered opposite reactions. The common everyday people—the people caught in the heart-wrenching mess of taxes and religious oppression and poverty--***loved*** Him. Simply put, the religious professionals—the ones who ***really*** knew their Bibles—couldn't stand him.

-This whole groundswell of fervor and excitement and peaked when Jesus rode into Jerusalem that day we now call Palm Sunday. It was clear. People thought he was the Messiah—the One God had promised would rescue them from their misery. Of course, this reception scared the religious authorities half to death. They are reported as saying, "Look! We've lost! The whole ***world*** has gone after him."

4. But that experience was the peak of Jesus' earthly career. In days, everything crashed and Jesus was executed—turned in by one of his own inner circle.

-I want you to imagine what it would've been like to be on Jesus' inner circle—and to go, in 6 short days, from a ticker-tape parade—hailed as the Savior—to total humiliation and execution. What do you *live* for after that?

-If that **had** been the end, I honestly don't think Jesus would've been remembered as a great moral teacher. I mean, what do you call someone who claims to be God—and then dies and rots like everyone else? Well, you would call that person a scam artist. A fraud. Or, as C.S. Lewis said, "A lunatic--on the same level as someone who thinks he is a poached egg."

5. But when Jesus walked out of the tomb on three days later, **everything** changed. By the way--just so we're clear--**resurrection** is different than **resuscitation**. Lazarus was raised from the dead—but he still got old and died. When Jesus was resurrected—this was something **totally** different.

He wasn't like Casper the friendly ghost—kind of this translucent being who fades in and out of view. His body was literally changed, as this passage says, to something we have no categories for. A **spiritual** body. All-powerful. Eternal—never decaying. With abilities we can't even conceive of.

-**That** made it clear that Jesus was not a Messiah wanna-be. Jesus was who He claimed to be. God. And He promised that **one** day—**we** will defeat death, as He did, and have a resurrection body like **His** body!

- B. Now. I've said all **that** to say **this**. If what Jesus said about Himself is true—and it is—then what He said about hope—and the future—and about how to live is **also** true and real. Last Sunday, John Deacon spoke on this--how that the resurrection was the vindication of **everything** Jesus had to say. That Jesus was not just brilliant—He was **right**.

-Jesus was right when He said:

"...love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:44-45 NLT)

-Jesus was **right** when He said:

"Don't store up treasures here on earth...Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19-20 NLT)

-Jesus was **right** when He said:

Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. (Matthew 7:12 MSG)

-Everything Jesus blessed **is**, in fact, blessed. Jesus blessed those who would humble themselves; He blessed those who would see themselves as servants—not bosses.

Jesus blessed those who would be willing to give their lives away. Here's the deal; if death has the final word—like, we die—and th-th-that's all folks! I can't think of anything more stupid than choosing a life that's selfless and full of sacrifice--and then you die and your candle goes out for good!

1. In the last days of his life, Jesus made it clear that God's Kingdom was coming here—and life is this brief opportunity to invest in what will last **forever**. If you want an image of this life—in comparison to **forever, imagine** a rope that runs through this building—in one side, out the other—and keeps going to infinity. This life, this 80 or 90 years we have would be like a knot in that rope. It's all we know.
-In the movie, **The Bucket List**, Jack Nicholson makes the comment that life blows by like smoke through a keyhole. The Good News is that we can make way more of a difference that we'd ever think. Friends—**what** we live for...no, **who** we live for—makes an astronomical difference.
2. The legacy Jesus left is that His Mission to restore this world and its people and make **all** things right—and **we get to be a part of it!** With the world in such an incredible mess—that seems hopeless. But it's not—because, see, the One who created the world provides the power, the love, the goodness and the opportunities!
-The plan? He totally renews our hearts, our minds, our influence. We get a fresh start—and it spreads from there as our love for God and others begins to impact everything we do, every place where we find ourselves. God's grace and power, when it truly gets worked into our hearts—becomes contagious. It spreads through our lives—and travels along our webs of influence. And those we influence as God's agents of change—influence others.
-His plan encompasses everything—and it's a powerful, amazing, holy, noble plan that **can't be stopped!** Because, see, **death** doesn't win; **God** does.
-But we have to choose—ultimately, every day, where we'll engage. Whether our life, our days, our money, our energy will ultimately be about us and our agenda—or about the **Lord's** work; i.e., what Jesus as Lord is up to on this planet.
3. The message of Jesus' life was—"So—invest wisely—and boldly! Be careful! The world system, with all its glitz, money and sex appeal—is **very** inviting. But it's dying. If that's where you invest—you will **lose** everything—because, baby, it's on it's way out!
-Why **wouldn't** we invest in what God's up to? Fear, I think, stops us. We're afraid of death. Death seems to end everything good. And if we're not careful, fear can dictate what we do. What if I get sick? What if I run out of money? What if I die and never get to live out my **bucket list**--take a cruise, jump out of an airplane, sit on a beach in Tahiti with a glass of wine and my feet in the surf?
-What we forget is—**death is on it's way out!** That's what this passage in 1 Corinthians 15 says.

For Christ must reign until he humbles all his enemies beneath his feet. And the last enemy to be destroyed is death. (1 Corinthians 15:25-26 NLT).

It looks powerful and scary because of how it takes down everybody—but it **doesn't** have the last word." How do we know? Jesus. His resurrection. That's our legacy!

- C. But to **see** that and **live** like that cuts cross-grain to conventional wisdom, doesn't it? To live and work and love and give as if your **real** reward, your **true** RSPs—the real awards ceremony is someplace else, not here, just seems, well—**weird**, to be honest. -Paul quotes what I believe is the official philosophy of the world system we live in:

**And if there is no resurrection, "Let's feast and drink, for tomorrow we die!"
(1 Corinthians 15:32 NLT)**

1. Now, most people do believe in life after death. But, for them, the point is to get the most out of **now**--not invest deeply in what lies **beyond** death.
 - If you look at the arc of Jesus' life—most people live for **Palm Sunday**. The high point **before** they hit the wall of death. The big crescendo. What's the Palm Sunday for **American Idol**? Well, to **win**, right? Or at least have Simon Cowell pay you a compliment. What then? Well—to get a record contract and concerts lined up. What then? Well, to become even more famous and more desirable. What then? Well, to have all the stuff that comes with fame and desirability—money, impressive friends, parties. What then? Paparazzi?
 - What's **Palm Sunday**—the big crescendo--in the corporate world? Well, you push, work hard, skip meals, days off and vacations to just keep climbing and producing and performing. If you get **noticed, what then?** Well, you get ahead in the rat race—climb over slower and clumsier rats—and rewarded with more pay, more responsibility, more kudos—and more work. **What then?** Well, you just keep **a-movin' on up!** More power, more pay, corner offices, cars, awards, travel. **What then?** The golden handshake? Golf? Florida? Gold-plated wheelchair?
2. I'm **not** trying to be morbid. But you **have** to ask the **what then?** question. And if the honest answer is--**Eat and drink and live it up—because then you die!** That's depressing!
 - When followers of Jesus buy into this kind of life, they're living as if the resurrection never happened.
3. Here's our biggest struggle. It's our inability to see beyond this huge **wall** at the end of life called death. We can't see beyond it. When we watch people's lives—no matter how great they are—they all hit this wall. Then, they're gone. When you ask the question, "What's next?" God promises that there's a resurrection—that Jesus was just the first to go through it—and our resurrection is inevitable. And that beyond that—there's life and power and joy and friendship and peace and unbelievable meaning. The problem is--you can't touch it, feel it, taste it or spend it.
 - It's like we catch these glimpses, sigh, and say, "Yeah, that's **cool**, but **now** I've got to go live in the **real** world of dust bunnies, blue box, car payments, dirty dishes, showers, breakfast, laundry, phone calls, email..." And we **do** have to live there.
4. And when we **live** in that space, everyday, if we're not careful—that space becomes our only frame of reference. We forget **who** we are. We forget our **real** mission. And we start gold-plating this dot—as if life ends at the knot.

III. CRAZY...OR UNBELIEVABLY WISE?

- A. And that's why Paul points people to the future with these final words of this chapter: **Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled: "Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? For sin is the sting that results in death, and the law gives sin its power. But thank God! He gives us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.**
(1 Corinthians 15:54-58 NLT)

1. Anyone here have a car you really, **really** like? I've got sad news for you! No matter how cool or well-built a car is, it starts dying the moment you start driving it.
 Wear, rust, weather, age and deterioration eventually take down houses, bridges, office towers, planes—everything, really. It would **appear** that death's victory is everywhere! Even in us. It's true, isn't it! Everything starts heading toward the ground before **we** even get there! We can slow the process down a little and spackle the cracks, plug the leaks—but age wins!
 -That's exactly why Paul, this early leader and writer tells people, "You need to look ahead—**way** ahead!. You need to look **beyond** death! If you don't, you'll start wavering in your faith. You'll start compromising, lose hope and live for the wrong things!
2. So. Our calling as followers of Jesus is to be **strong** and **immovable**. Let me ask a question: How much of what you hear everyday—wherever you are--is focused on being smart, cool, wealthy, healthy and prepared for life on **this** side of death? About 100%, I'd say. If that's all you listen to, that's pretty much all you'll think about. And if that's all you think about, that's pretty much what you'll live for.
 -How does a person become physically strong? Usually they have to eat right and exercise. Exercise a **lot!** There are days when it's time for me to run—and I don't **feel** like it. It's cold or wet or messy or hot. There are days when it's time for me to do sit-ups and push-ups—and I don't **feel** like it. But I do it because I like the end result—you know, having this amazing, buff body! **In my dreams!**
 -To strengthen yourself against a culture that tells you to gold-plate the tiny knot we live in called, "my life", you will need anti-venom. Truth that counteracts that poison—and looks beyond this life. The **only** book with trustworthy information on that is The Bible. **Especially**, the teachings of the New Testament. So, how are you going to get this counter-active flow of information going? You will have to either **read** God's Word for yourself—regularly—or listen to it on CDs—like these. I wish I could tell you that if you put the Bible under your pillow—the information will seep into your brain. It won't.
 -See, the Bible says that our transformation comes by the renewing of our minds. And our minds are renewed by something called the **law of exposure**.

What you expose yourself to, you think about. What you think about—you become. That’s why the Bible says,

Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. (Philippians 4:8 NLT)

3. Fortunately, we have **all kinds** of resources in our world to make that easier. Knowing truth gives us strength; it gives us an immovable foundation in life. Jesus talked about that, remember? He said, “When the flood comes...and it **will** come, you’d better have a foundation, or everything you’ve built into will get swept away.

-When I think of something immovable, I think of a huge tree with deep roots. The root system doesn’t just make the tree immovable—it gives it life! Roots, see, keep reaching for water. Ever go through a dry time in life? When you reach out to God and what He says about life in those times—roots grow. Roots grow when bad weather hits—and the wind shakes the tree.

-Ever had some rogue wind come along that shakes you up—knocks you off balance—and you reach out to God—and trust Him even when your knees are

shaking? Your roots grow. And over time—you become immovable! See, the decisions we make every day determine whether our faith will go deep in God—or we’ll be like a ball of sagebrush blowing across the desert.

4. But **knowing** this truth—in and of itself--doesn’t make you a strong, deep person. I’ll prove this. How many of you think that you can grow muscles and get six-pack abs by reaching books, attending seminars, and watching TV shows on running, exercising, nutrition and body building?

-Knowing what to do doesn’t matter if there’s no sweat equity, right? It’s the same with truth. To grow in love—you have to **exercise** love, **choose** love, even when you don’t feel like it. To grow in patience, you have to **exercise** patience. To grow in compassion and mercy, you have to **exercise** compassion and mercy.

To grow in generosity, you have to **exercise** generosity. And to **exercise**, you need a community of believers around you. People who encourage you; who lift you up when you fall down. People who pray for you—and sometimes challenge you.

-I hope The Olive Branch will be that place—that community. But for a community like this to do you any good, it will take more than showing up and disappearing once a week. To **belong** you really have to take the time and effort to get to know people; to serve with them—and allow them to know you.

-The first step is us getting to know each other by name. **That’s** why we wear name tags. If you don’t have one—we’ll make you one! Can we just start

using the 10 minute rule again? Where, for the first 10 minutes after a service you don't go to the people you already know, but you get to know someone new? Can we do that? It's a **start!**

- B. Maybe that's where this second exhortation comes in. **Always work enthusiastically for the Lord.** Now, what comes to mind when you think of working enthusiastically for the Lord? Do you think of happy enthusiastic Kid's Branch teachers?

Youth sponsors? Musicians and greeters and sound techs and Branch Out volunteers and Ushers and Hospitality people and Board Members who are cheerful, gung-ho and ready to take on the world?

-Hopefully—cause it **includes** that—but I think it's **bigger** than that. **Way** bigger.

1. See, in this world system, God has his fingers in **everything**. Think about our world—and the sadness and disease and poverty. Think of the injustice of sweat shops, of people who can't get ahead. Think of the greed that drives economies. God **loves** the world and all it's people.

His work—is making people's hearts right, making people's relationships right—and making the world right. When you engage in any of these areas—you are doing **His** work!

-And if we will let Him be Lord, leader, ruler in this little kingdom called our heart—He can use **us!**

2. What I'm trying to say is that what happens here in this building on weekends is a **part** of that—but **just** a part. You know the verse,

“For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16-17 NLT)

-What if I were to put it like this—as I did a few weeks ago. **For God so loved your world—that He sent you—not to judge it, but to save it!**

-See, the truth about you and me is that our purpose in life is not to just to consume our share of the world's stuff, go to church, hang out, and go to Heaven. He's sent His Spirit into the heart of every follower to change us, comfort us, walk with us, and help us find our way.

-But the Spirit of Jesus is **also** living in us to bring God's influence and leadership to every place we find ourselves. See, He wants to **turn Jesus loose** on your home, your world—in Wal-Mart, cubicle land, No Frills, IBM, Village Nissan—**everywhere!** And when every little kingdom-ette has been brought under the solid influence of God, our work is done! But, it's not done **until** then.

3. Why enthusiasm? What does enthusiasm actually mean? Some people who are enthusiastic get a little scary and weird. When I hear the word enthusiasm, I think of someone who **loves** what they're doing—and **especially** the ones they're doing it for.

Think about the people who, right now, are working at the campaign headquarters for John McCain, for Barak Obama, for Hillary Clinton.

-Now, I'm sure every day's not a party. But under it all is this burning desire to make a difference, and the belief that they are.

- C. And, of course, that's Paul's final call. ...**For you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless.** And that really is the question, isn't it? Is it worth it? What's the pay off for living in a redemptive way?

1. See, no matter how high the roller coaster takes you—it **always** leads you to the same place. There's this free fall at the end of it called death.

Even Jesus hit it. Death steals **everything—EXCEPT** what you've invested beyond it.

2. There's this little self-serving, whiny voice in us that always asks: "So. What's the pay-off? Let's say I fully engage my life in serving and giving and loving and working toward God's purposes in this world—will it be worthwhile?
-To be **totally** honest—I would have to say--it depends on what you're looking for. Jesus said you need to count the cost of following him.

And the trail behind Jesus, friends, has been a bloody one at times. I can guarantee this, though—you **will** find adventure, and joy—and the **power** of God behind you.

-But even that's not the primary reward. It can't be, because death ultimately steals it. My parents loved God and lived lives of service to others. But if **all it led to was a better life here**—and it **did**—it still got stolen by heart disease and cancer. See, these bodies of ours only last so long.

3. And that's why the payoff isn't here on this planet. We enjoy some of the rewards—but there is an awards ceremony on the other side of this wall of death that completely and totally and thoroughly vindicates a life that is fully lived following Jesus. The reward isn't eternal retirement—floating around on clouds and eating Twinkies.

-No, it's way beyond that. We receive a body that is more magnificent than our wildest dreams. It will never ache, never get bruised or crippled or suffer from memory loss or dementia. And in that body we will serve God in ways the human mind has **never** been able to imagine. In that body we will finally enjoy the intimacy and full community with others that we never found here.

-In that body, we will never look enviously at someone else's body; never look in the mirror and sigh. Never look at modern art and feel stupid. Never spill things or clutz out. And **finally**, all the fear and sadness and confusion and humiliation and frustration of life will be seen, only in the rear view mirror.

4. Is it **worth** it to give yourself fully to what God is up to in redeeming this world? You'd better believe it is, because, see, when we do, we have a chance to see people's lives changed for all eternity. **Nothing** you do for the Lord is **ever** useless—no matter how small it seems.
5. What you and I live for—and we **will** make a choice on this--really boils down to who you believe: Jesus—or the prophets of our world system who say, "You'd better grab what you can while you can." I would simply say—you've got one shot at this, so choose well. **Choose well!**

IV. CLOSING

- A. I want to ask you to take another look at your **Bucket List**. Given what Jesus said about living a life that **really** counts—has it changed? What's driving the choices you make each day?

Is it the hope that someday the Palm Sunday parade will be in your honor? If so—will it be enough? What do you **really** want to accomplish with your one and only life.

- B. If you have made a decision to follow Jesus—flat out—and give your life away, **you are not crazy!** Because Jesus, Son of God, the wisest person to walk on this planet said:

If you try to hang on to your life, you will lose it. But if you give up your life for my sake, you will save it. (Luke 9:24 NLT)