

Series: **SHOCKWAVES!** March 23, 2008

**THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT IN HISTORY**  
**1 Corinthians 15:3-8, 13-20**

**I. INTRO**

- A. I believe the resurrection of Jesus Christ is, by far, the single most important event in all of history. Out of curiosity, I googled, ***the most important event in history*** to see what other people thought. I was kind of disappointed by the result.
- Interesting—many people think human inventions are the most important things to have happened in human history—anything from the wheel to immunization to the TV.
1. Some guy who simply calls himself ***FuzzyWuz*** writes: “Guess I’d hafta say it was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.”  
-Another guy, who sounds ***much*** more intellectual than ***FuzzyWuz*** says, “You *do* realize that is physically impossible, right?”
  2. I have no idea who ***FuzzyWuz*** is—or what kind of a bean-eater would even choose a name like that—but from what I’ve seen and what I know—I would have to agree with him.
  3. The best image I could come up with to describe the power—and in some ways, the hiddenness, of what happened that morning, 2000 years ago, is in some ways a negative one. For it to work, you’ll have to do a mental 180. Can I tell you what it is—without throwing you off and bringing you to a full and sudden stop with your seat in the upright position?  
-The ***image*** is a ***positive*** version of the ***tsunami*** that took place on Dec. 26, 2004; a ***tsunami of LIFE***, not death. I had ***no*** idea of the incredible force of what happened under the Indian Ocean that day. Indian Ocean at 12:58 a.m. Universal Time.  
-At 12:58 AM, Universal Time, two massive plates of rock shifted 19 kilometers under the surface of the earth—affecting almost 1000 miles of ocean floor. This released the equivalent of 575 gigatons of energy. Anyone have a handle on that? It would be enough energy to power the US for 370 years. This earthquake, 9.3 on the Richter scale, was so massive it actually moved islands and caused the earth to wobble slightly on its axis.  
-But on the surface of the ocean—all that was visible was a ripple—a wave one to two feet high. As you know, the true devastation of what had happened showed up anywhere from 15 to 7 hours later in ***tsunamis*** over 100 feet high.
  4. On the surface, it would appear that what happened on Sunday morning in that tomb outside Jerusalem, 30 A.D., was a ripple. It didn’t wake anyone up; in fact, it put the guards to sleep. No one realized that deep in the spiritual core of the universe, immense power had been released. A force that has affected humans from the moment of recorded time—death--was reversed.  
-That day, a ***tsunami*** of life was released—life that is still largely under the surface renewing and washing human hearts. But a ***tsunami*** of life and grace that will one day reach the shore and change ***everything***—only, for the better.
- B. Jesus’ teachings on ethics are ***breathtaking***--but Christianity, at its heart—is not a series of ethical teachings. His followers baptize, worship, remember Him through eating bread and drinking wine—but Christianity, at its heart, is not a religion—or a set of rituals to do and rules to follow. Christianity, at its core, is ***LIFE!*** A ***tsunami*** of life. It started with the resurrection of Jesus from the dead—who was betrayed, beaten,

crucified outside Jerusalem—and buried in a borrowed grave. This isn't based on myth and speculation—but on eyewitness account. The resurrection is the hinge point of history because it changed **everything**.

-If the shifting of rocks releases enough power to rock this planet on its axis--what kind of power must be released when death, which has been stalking life and destroying everything on this planet thousands of years—gets reversed at the subterranean level?

-**That's** the power I want to talk about—the power that has released a kind of tsunami of transformation under the surface of life as we know it. It's personal, for me, because Jesus resurrection is the hinge point in **my** life. Today, my challenge is to tell you the story as best as I can, and then **you'll** have to decide who and what you will believe.

## II. DID IT ACTUALLY HAPPEN?

- A. I think the biggest question that gets asked in a world like ours is—**Did the resurrection actually happen?** That's a valid—and **very** important question. Let me read the eyewitness accounts first:

**But very early on Sunday morning the women went to the tomb, taking the spices they had prepared. They found that the stone had been rolled away from the entrance. So they went in, but they didn't find the body of the Lord Jesus. As they stood there puzzled, two men suddenly appeared to them, clothed in dazzling robes. The women were terrified and bowed with their faces to the ground. Then the men asked, "Why are you looking among the dead for someone who is alive? He isn't here! He is risen from the dead! Remember what he told you back in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men and be crucified, and that he would rise again on the third day." Then they remembered that he had said this. So they rushed back from the tomb to tell his eleven disciples—and everyone else—what had happened. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. But the story sounded like nonsense to the men, so they didn't believe it. However, Peter jumped up and ran to the tomb to look. Stooping, he peered in and saw the empty linen wrappings; then he went home again, wondering what had happened. (Luke 24:1-12 NLT).**

1. One of the questions that's been asked historically is, "Was Jesus really dead?" One theory is that Jesus actually never died. That he fainted—and his followers **thought** He was dead, so they wrapped him up and buried him in this tomb—more like a cave carved out of rock—and rolled the stone in front of the door. In the coolness of this cave, Jesus revived. When his disciples saw him, they were so inspired they circulated the story that he had risen from the dead. The book, **The Da Vinci Code**, claims that he survived the cross, married Mary Magdalene, and moved to France and had a baby.

-The problem is—that doesn't square with the facts. First, Roman soldiers knew how to kill people—and if someone survived, they paid with their life. That's why, when the Roman soldier **thought** Jesus was dead, he took his spear, shoved it up into Jesus chest cavity and into his heart—so that blood and water poured out.

-Let's say he did faint. Imagine the condition Jesus was in. He'd had the flesh stripped off his back with a beating, 7 inch iron spikes driven through his wrists—crushing the nerve going to the hands, and a single spike driven

through both feet. He's been stabbed in the chest with a spear, immobilized with grave wrappings and 75 pounds of spices, and put in a cave with a stone weighing approximately a ton rolled in front of the door.

-Does it make sense to you that, as horribly injured as he was, he could've unwound the burial cloths, moved a ton of rock, gotten past the guards, and inspired his disciples that he had been raised from the dead? It doesn't make sense. And experts who have studied crucifixion from a medical viewpoint unanimously agree that Jesus was dead.

2. Several years ago, a book came out entitled *The Passover Plot*. The theory was that Jesus' disciples came and stole Jesus' body, huddled together, then made up a story that He was risen to continue His movement.

-The main problem with this is who every account reports as being the very first witnesses. Anyone know who it was?

**Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and several other women who told the apostles what had happened. (Luke 24:10 NLT)**

You may be thinking, "So what?!" but in that culture, a woman's testimony was not allowed in court. If 500 women saw a man murder someone—and no man saw it—the murderer would go free. Here's my point. If Jesus' disciples were going to steal the body and say he was risen—they would've chosen witnesses whose testimony would've been accepted in a male-dominated culture.

-It's pretty clear in these eyewitness accounts that that Jesus' closest followers weren't prone to superstition. Like us, they had *real* trouble believing that Jesus wasn't still dead. In fact even after all the other disciples had seen Jesus, Thomas, one of the original twelve, said, "*I'm* not going to believe until I can stick my fingers in the nail holes—and shove my hand into his chest where the spear punctured his heart.

-And there's another problem. Ten of Jesus' disciples were died gruesome deaths—defiantly defending their account of Jesus' resurrection to their last breath. Only one of the Eleven who were left died of natural causes; John—and he was exiled. People will die for something they *believe* to be true; but they won't die for something they know to be a lie.

3. One other theory is that the disciples, like most people back then, were gullible hicks who were suckers for ghost stories. You know, being less educated than us—it was much easier for myths to develop—and people to believe them. After all, weren't these accounts written after several hundred years of church history?

-First, saying, "Jesus rose from the dead" was just as controversial 2000 years ago as it is today. We can be quite arrogant, sometimes, in the way we think. We are not the first generation of humans to notice that dead people tend to *stay* dead. Smart people have known this for a long time—which is why they sealed them in caves.

-The other fact is that we now know that the narratives of Jesus' life were written somewhere between 30 and 60 years after his death. Experts are clear; myths don't develop that quickly. Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection took place in Jerusalem—which is where the Church started and was strongest. The eyewitnesses would've been still alive when these accounts were first written and distributed.

4. That's what makes Paul, and early church leader's account of Jesus' resurrection so interesting:

**I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8 NLT)**

-There is broad agreement that Paul wrote these words somewhere around 55 AD—25 years after Jesus death and resurrection. But that's not all. He is **passing on** something to them that had been **passed on** to him by the Apostles. Not only did he tell them this when he started the church, some years before—he is using technical language indicating that these words were part of the earliest church creeds and oral history. This is **early** stuff—possibly developed within 10 years of Jesus death and resurrection. .

-Paul says, "This **happened!** It really did! There were over 500 people who saw Jesus after his resurrection. If you don't believe me, go talk to one of the other 500 witnesses; most of them are still alive!"

- B. One of the most interesting things **I've** ever heard people say is, "It **doesn't matter** if it's true or not!" That's just **crazy!** If Jesus **didn't** make it out of the grave alive, then what He said about Himself, what He said about truth, what He said about the Father, and what He said about eternity is all up for grabs. Listen to what Paul, this early leader and eye witness, says:

**And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. (1 Corinthians 15:14 NLT)**

Paul said:

**And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17 NLT)**

Paul said:

**And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world. (1 Corinthians 15:19 NLT)**

1. John Ortberg tells about being with a group of Christian students at Harvard and MIT a number of years ago where a really bright coed was talking about how central the Resurrection was to everything in our faith. She finally said, in commenting on this passage, "What Paul is saying here is, 'If Christ be not raised from the dead, we're hosed!'"
- That would be an interesting Easter liturgy for the church, wouldn't it? I would say, "**If Christ be not raised from the dead, we're hosed.**" And you would say, "**We are hosed, indeed!**"

2. Seriously—without the resurrection of Jesus, friends, He *isn't* a great moral teacher. As I said last week, Jesus taught that His resurrection would verify **everything** He taught about forgiveness, about the Father, about Him being the way to life—**everything**. Without it, He had no authority to say and do the things He did.
- In fact, if Jesus bones are, in fact, in some ossuary—or bone box—that would make Him the biggest liar of all time. Liars are **not** great moral teachers.
3. Jesus said that he had come to defeat the kingdom of darkness and death—and make things right on this planet. He said that this invisible Kingdom, in seed form, would grow **way** beyond anyone's dreams. That love would ultimately conquer violence and bloodshed and bullying. That heart after heart after heart would be transformed by the Spirit who would come to live in them—and that his followers would, in fact, become world-changers.
- When Jesus walked out of that grave, friends, it became clear if death couldn't take Him down, **nothing** would stand in his way! That's what transformed this scared, disappointed, disillusioned little band of followers into an army that would ultimately outlast the Roman Empire—and go to their deaths with, **Jesus is Lord** on their lips. If you compare that tiny group to this massive Roman Empire, who would **ever** think that one day we would be naming our children Peter, John, Paul and Mary—and naming our dogs Nero and Caesar!
- In fact**, on the third day, totally contrary to what his disciples and followers **thought** would happen, Jesus was raised from the dead. And He **still** lives. And this tsunami of hope and life is moving toward every shore, every person, and every institution on this planet—and **one** day, death itself will be swept away!

### III. A CRESCENDO OF HOPE

- A. You need to know—the fact of Jesus' resurrection isn't just part of a dusty old creed that we quote every so often. Ever since Jesus walked out of the grave, He has left a trail of transformed lives. So, I want to close by talking about this torch that's been passed to us—how this hope changes **everything!** First, the future.
1. I need to be very clear that the **afterlife** was not some new idea that came with the resurrection of Jesus. The afterlife is why The Egyptians built pyramids. It's why Greeks would place a gold coin in the hands of corpses so they could pay the fee to cross the River Styx and make it to Hades. But all the ideas floating around were speculative—and not all that inviting. How many of you would want your eternity to just be more of what you have here? Not me!
- I read a story about some students from a Christian college who were going door-to-door to talk to people about their faith. They came to one door, and the woman who answered it was a Mom—and she was not having a good day. She had a vacuum cleaner in one arm and a baby in the other. One child was crying in the background; another was writing on the walls with a crayon. There was this vague smell of something burning, the phone was ringing and the TV was blaring.
- The student timidly asked, "Ma'am, are you interested in eternal life?" She answered, "Frankly, I don't think I could stand it!"
2. The teaching of the resurrection is **not** the teaching that the soul is immortal and will one day escape the body forever. The teaching of the resurrection is **not** the teaching of an afterlife. The teaching of the resurrection of Jesus is that this God who promised to make all things right, correct every injustice, and set

right this world that is **so** messed up—**is going to do just that!** It's **already started** with Jesus' coming—and it this movement of making all things new will one day sweep us up—and we will be made new—and dwell forever in a very physical, tangible world that has also been made new. We will have bodies like Jesus' resurrection body; we will enjoy food, beauty, vegetation—only it **won't** be tainted with death. Because of Jesus, because of all He did—death is **so** wrecked! God is going to redeem everything—**everything** He's made—and it's already begun!

- B. How many of you in the summer, ever get weeds? How many of you would be **happy** to see weeds—**anything** green—cause you don't think summer will **ever** come again? What's the **best** way to deal with weeds? Pull them out by the roots, right? If you mow them down—they come back. Like snow. If you shovel snow, **it** comes back. -Well, Jesus didn't just go after death—He went after the root cause—the very thing that started this whole process of aging and wrinkles and heart-failure and cancer and pimples and cellulite. No, not chocolate chip cookies. It was sin. This selfish, self-centered, "I'm-going-to-get-my-own-way-even-if-it-kills-me" thing that is deep down inside us.
1. **We** don't think we have a problem with it, but **that's** why He came. He didn't come so everyone would be inspired to give a little more of themselves and make the world a better place. He came to deal once for all with the enemy of everything good. Sin. Sin is like cancer of the soul. First it kills off the good in your life—and it ultimately kills you.  
-God, in the very beginning of things, said that sin brings death. Not only does it kill hopes and dreams and relationships—it is the core disease behind all sadness and corruption and entropy and disintegration. Sin kills everything it touches. And the **only** antidote is the death Jesus died in our place on the cross—authenticated by the resurrection that took place three days later.
  2. **I** have a past. Ask Lori. And you do, too. Anyone here ever haunted by their past? I mean, you get that, don't you? Cruel, selfish things I've done and said. I'm ashamed of my arrogance—and how it's shown itself. I'm amazed at how low I've stooped—and how stupid I've been. The **antidote** to that regret—is what Jesus freely did on my behalf. The gift of grace and forgiveness He died to give me—and to anyone who will trust him. Man, what an **incredible** gift.  
-The problem is—my past doesn't just **stay** in the past. And it's not like the forensic experts have traced the DNA to my home—and now I'm going to be convicted—I keep messing up.  
-Here's the deal. Just having God forgive and wash our past isn't enough. It would be a little like a dentist drilling out a cavity—which, in my mouth, could leave a **massive** hole—and then never filling it. It's not enough for God to just clean up this house I call my soul; so He sent His Spirit to come and live here and fill my heart—and continue to work and make **all** things new and grow me up. He encourages me. He helps me learn to give back and not just take. He warns me about falling into the same old ruts—and points out new and better roads. He gives, well—**life!** .
  3. And that's not all. He doesn't just become our Dad, our best Friend, our Guide; as I mentioned last week, He uses us in meaningful was to touch our world— one person, one act of compassion and generosity and love at a time. I used to make the problem of sin on this planet **worse**; now He uses me in small ways to make things somehow better.

-And that's His plan to change the world. You know the people in that first little church started 2000 years ago—how, within 300 years, they impacted the entire Roman Empire? Well, they were just ordinary folks. Like you and me.

-I have a tough question for you. Have you ever bowed your knee to God—and instead of excusing your sin and telling Him you're not really all **that** bad—**asked** for His grace, His forgiveness, His fresh start—made possible through Jesus? You could, you know. Right now. Jesus' resurrection is as powerful now as it was 2000 years ago. He brings hope and life—and offers it to you!

- C. You may be thinking, "Okay. What Jesus did for us settles our past—and guarantees our future—but what about **right now?**" Life has a way of sometimes being quite disappointing, doesn't it? Years ago, I remember being in a room with a bunch of teens when the song by Peggy Lee came on; **Is that all there is?** Anyone remember it? One girl said, "I **hate** that song! It's so depressing!" It **is** actually quite depressing—enhanced by this weird, funky beat.
1. She talks about watching their family home burn down, going to the circus with her Dad, falling in love and getting left alone. And when the fire died down, the circus was over and her lover left her all alone...**naturally...** she thought, **-Is that all there is, is that all there is?**  
**If that's all there is my friends, then let's keep dancing. Let's break out the booze and have a ball**  
**If that's all there is.**
  2. We experience that disappointment, don't we? We really, **really** look forward to something—then it's here—then gone. It's the experience of living in a world that, right now, is **deeply** flawed and affected by death and hassle and disintegration. We pore over catalogues, search the internet, bargain for the best deal—and buy the car we've been lusting after. At first it seems to be the sleek, fast, sexy, road-hugging dream-machine the propaganda says it is. But then it gets its first dent, first scratch, first hint of rust—and you come to this startling surprise, **It's just a CAR!**
  3. And sometimes it's not just unmet expectations—things go **really** wrong. You get fired. Something goes terribly wrong with your body. You go through a series of blows that, in themselves are not huge—but **together?** They're like a pile-driver—driving you into the mud.  
-Does stuff like that fit under the power of the resurrection? It does. But not in the way you might think. See, Jesus doesn't use resurrection power to beam us up when life starts to get tough or disappointing—or terrifying. He doesn't turn our enemies into smoking grease spots in the driveway. What He does is better—if you can hear me on this. He works **through** that stuff in **us**. He works **right in the middle** of it. And He promises that as **alone** as we may feel, **I will never leave you or forsake you!**
  4. See, the way it works is that in a world like ours is that God has given every person free will. We can choose to do good—or evil. We can choose to act in humility—or pride. We can choose greed or generosity. And our choices make an impact on others. **That's** what free will is—and what it does. What other people do with their free will, their choices, sometimes creates pain in our lives.  
-What the resurrection of Jesus proves is that **God alone** has the last word. When Jesus walked here, people freely chose to come and be healed...or not. Judas saw every miracle Jesus did--then **chose**, for whatever reason, to betray Him. The religious professionals **chose** to reject Him as the Messiah. Pilate

**chose** to turn him over for crucifixion. Joseph **chose** to ask for Jesus limp body, wrap him up, and put him in his own grave.

-But, you see, then God **chose** to raise Him from the dead. God **chose** to use the most awful, heinous thing we could've **ever** done to Him—to make a way of forgiveness and life and the renewal of all things.

-I guess what I'm saying is that no **matter** how dark the cave is that you seem to be in; no matter **how** final things appear to be, no matter how tightly wrapped in grave clothes you are—there's **hope!** The Bible is clear that because of the resurrection power of Jesus—there is **no** hopeless situation; there is **no** wasted prayer; there is **nothing** that can or will separate us from God's love. He's **always** at work. Always. What He asks is for our trust.

#### IV. CLOSING

- A. Bishop Ken Ulmer is the pastor of a mostly African American congregation in Los Angeles—a **huge** church. In one of his messages, he tells the story of two men at an art museum who come to a painting of two men playing chess. One is obviously a man in deep trouble; the other looks suspiciously like the devil. The man is down to his last piece on the chessboard—and the painting's title is, **Checkmate!**
1. Ken says that one of these guys visiting the gallery was an international chess champion—totally intrigued by this painting. Seeing that his friend was restless, he said, "Go look at the other stuff—something's bugging me about this painting and I want to study it."
 

-His friend came back later, and this chess champion is bobbing his head—and using his hand to move imaginary chess pieces. So his friend asks, "What's wrong with the painting?" The guy says, "Well it's entitled **Checkmate**, but the title is wrong. The painter either needs to change the title or change the painting. See, the **King still has one more move.**"
  2. If you've ever been to an African-American church—you can just imagine what happened next. "Um-Hmmm!" "Yes!" **Preach it brother. Bring it home.**"
 

-See, that's the Good News of Easter, in case you're confused. The King still has one more move!

    - a. A young teenager named David is up against this giant named Goliath. He's in deep trouble. He tries to fit in Saul's armor, but it won't work. He can't even handle a sword. It **looks** like a checkmate, but...
 

**The King still has one more move!**
    - b. A man named Daniel gets thrown into a den of lions because he refuses to stop calling on his God. The lions are hungry—and he's in there all night. At the first light of dawn, the king cautiously calls down—and Daniel tells him that the lions have been put on a low-protein diet. He's **fine**, because...
 

**The King still has one more move!**
  3. And this is the hope of Easter. Jesus is initially welcomed into Jerusalem by a huge parade. But by the end of the week, it all goes terribly, terribly wrong. Jesus is betrayed, tried, rejected, beaten—and nailed to a cross. And then he's put in a grave to rot the way every human body has rotted ever since death entered this sorry, dark world. And then the authorities said to everybody, "That's all folks. Show's over. Time to go home. **CHECKMATE!**" But they were wrong. Know why?
 

**Because the King still had one more move!**

- B. The Resurrection of Jesus is not some nice doctrine that Christians celebrate every Easter with lilies, Easter eggs and chocolate bunnies. The Resurrection of Jesus is the hinge point in **all** history. Think about it: It is the **only** reason to have hope in a world like ours. The resurrection of Jesus is this massive earthquake that happened deep in this whole universe. Didn't look like much at the time—just a few ripples on the surface—but there is a tsunami of life coming you and I can't possibly imagine, and it's already started!

-My question for you is—will the resurrection of Jesus be the hinge point, the dividing line in **your** history? Whatever challenges you may be facing, **it could be!** .

-Would you be willing to trust in what Jesus did; that just as He forever changed history—He can change your history by the forgiveness and life-change—and **hope** He offers you. As dark as things get--**The King still has one more move!**