

**Behind the “Seens”**  
**2 Corinthians 4:1, 6-9, 14-18**

Let me begin by telling you what I am praying will happen in your life today through this Easter service:

1. **That you will experience the love, the ongoing presence and the power of the risen Jesus** -- so that you will always know the one who is with you is greater than anything you will face in this world;
2. **That you will gain a new vision for your ultimate future** -- so that you will not lose heart and will always have hope no matter what challenges or adversity may happen in your life.

To those ends, I want to take you to the story of one man who had an experience with Jesus after Jesus’s death. His name was Paul and he came from the city of Tarsus, a town now in south-central Turkey. Paul’s experience and all that he came to learn after he had met Jesus gave him a vision for his future that all the hardships in this world – even death itself, could not eradicate. Know this: Paul was a real human being, a Jewish man who apparently kept being confused for being an Egyptian, mostly because of the color of his skin.

<https://lifeondoverbeach.files.wordpress.com/2010/09/apostle-paul-by-rublev1.jpg> He was one of the best educated men in his society and probably came from a wealthy home. So, as a young man, Paul was on the fast track -- bound for success among his people. His testimony, found in Philippians 3, was that he had everything going for him that everyone in his society wanted.

And, then one day he met Jesus. Again, this meeting took place after Jesus had died. Yes, Paul was one of more than 500 people who had seen Jesus after he had risen. Later, Paul was called on to give witness in court to Felix, who was the Governor over the entire province where Paul lived and to their local King Agrippa. Paul told about the fact that he had genuinely met the Jesus whom everyone knew had died on a cross. Felix, who knew of Paul’s great education said, “Paul your great learning is driving you insane.” But, Paul said, “What I am saying is true and reasonable. Our own King Agrippa is familiar with these things because he has been here. None of this has escaped his attention because none of this has happened in a corner. **(Acts 26:23-26)**.”

You see, Paul had done what I have done – and many here have done, i.e., he had put Jesus at the center of his life. He had made a decision to believe Jesus is who Jesus said he was, i.e., the Son of God who will take away our guilt and feelings of shame, make us alive to God and make life now livable – even in a world as hard as this one sometimes can be. What happened to Paul is what I pray will happen to you.

**He had met the risen Jesus and through him had an ongoing experience of the love, the ongoing presence, and the power of Jesus for every part of his life.** *We do not lose heart* (2 Cor 4:1, 16).

Knowing Jesus sustained Paul through all the “stuff” this world threw at him. And, let me tell you this: If you sometimes think your life is challenging, then you should hear some of the things that happened to Paul after he became a Christian. He wrote about it in one of his letters: Here’s a part of what had happened to him: *“Five times I received forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once pelted with stones, three times shipwrecked. I spent a night and a day in the open sea. I have been in danger from rivers, from bandits, from my fellow Jews and from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in the country, and at sea... I have often gone without sleep and without food; I have known hunger and thirst... **(2 Cor 11:24-27)**.”*

Listen carefully: Paul’s life wasn’t always that hard. He would say that he had learned to live in abundance as well as to be in need (Phil 4:12). What I’m saying is that in every situation Paul knew that the risen Jesus was with him so that what sometimes seem like overwhelming things in this world did not overwhelm him. He could be content in any situation in this world because he knew the love, presence and power of Jesus.

That’s why Paul could write in our passage today, **2 Cor 4:8-9**: *We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

I love the way one of my college professors, Dr. Merrill Tenney, put this. When we know the risen Jesus:

- Squeezed but never squashed,
- Bewildered but never befuddled,
- Pursued but never abandoned,
- Knocked down but never knocked out.

That is what I’m praying you will experience even in those times that are tough in your life. When you follow Jesus, on one side, you begin in ever-new-ways to enjoy so many things in life. You see good things as

God's loving gifts to you. But, on the other side, this world is not perfect and sometimes will continue to be hard. I want you to know that whatever you have done in your life and whatever you face in your life, Jesus loves you and will not leave you alone. There is no place you can go that you do not have him available to you. **There are no God-abandoned people in this world.** God loves people.

And, **there are no God-forsaken places in this world either.** That's what I pray you will experience this Easter 2019: That you will experience the love, the ongoing presence and the power of the risen Jesus so that you will always know that the one who is with you is greater than anything you face in this world – even death itself. As Paul wrote, I pray you will never lose heart. That's my first prayer for you today.

The second thing I want to happen because you've come today is that you'll have a confidence about your future that nothing and no one in this world can ever steal from you. That's what Paul also gave testimony to.

**He had gained a vision for his future that nothing in this world could take away.** *What is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal (2 Cor 4:18).*

Here, Paul wrote about what all of us already know – whether you are religious or unreligious, i.e., that material things don't last. They “waste away (4:16).” You do know that, don't you? As a child, you think that if only you can get that bike you want, then life would be perfect. <https://www.twowheelingtots.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Huffy-Rock-It-600x400.gif> But, you get it and get bored with it – or you crash it – or someone steals it... It's not enough to satisfy your deepest longing – and it doesn't last either.

So, you learn surely from that childhood experience – right? No, when you get older, you've got to have that Lamborghini Veneno Roadster (<https://i2.cdn.turner.com/money/dam/assets/130304230146-lamborghini-veneno-geneva-auto-show-live-640x360.jpg>). Top of the line -- \$4M bucks! But, I think that, even if you got it, you'd find that, like your bike, though it gives pleasure, it doesn't fill up all the longings of your human heart. And, you always will be haunted by the fact that an earthquake, or a thief or a fire could destroy it. Even the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris can be devastated by a fire – though the God it points to cannot! I could go on and on about this – but I'm sure you get my point.

We all need something that gets “behind the scenes” – beyond what we see with our physical eyes.

Many of you know that Chris and I have experienced enormous losses in our lives. All four of our parents have died. We lost our middle child in infancy. I lost my only brother at age 43 due to a drunk driver hitting him in Laredo, TX. May I share with you what I wrote in my journal after my brother's death? *“I'm learning that the way I handle the tragedies of this world is enormously affected by what I believe my ultimate future to be. Each time I am dealt a blow like Chuck's death -- because of a man convicted three times of DUIs and released each time only to do it again -- I have to ask myself whether justice will ever be served on those who do such wrongs, whether I will ever see my brother again, and whether I will once again trust that God has a plan in all this. The only sufficient answer to the evil, the pain and the injustice of this world is that there is a life beyond this life – one in which I will see him again – one in which wrongs will be dealt with and all things will be made right.”*

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That's what a follower of the risen Jesus believes. We believe that God will judge evil so that justice will be served. Even if our courts don't deal with the wrongs we experience, we believe God will. When we think about things that are wrong in our world, we hold on to the fact that ultimately, all wrongs will be made right.

We believe that God is here and at work even in the hard times – that God has the ability to use the most painful and unjust experiences we go through -- to bring about his good. Listen to what **Fyodor Dostoevsky** wrote about this in *The Brothers Karamazov*: *“I believe, like a child believes, that all suffering will be healed and made up for, that all the humiliating absurdity of human contradictions will vanish like a pitiful mirage, that in the world's finale, something so precious will come to pass that it will suffice for all hearts, for the comforting of all resentments, for the atonement of all the crimes of humanity, for all the blood that they've shed; that God's finale will make it not only possible to forgive but to justify all that has happened.”*

Do you grasp that? That the ultimate ending of all things will be so good that we will be able to make sense of all the junk that has happened in our lives and in our world. We will see that God has been at work in all things, -- yes, all things – to bring about a greater good. **We live life now working against evil and injustice but with the firm conviction that God works through whatever things are happening to bring about a kingdom of peace and justice. He can even use a crucifixion to bring about our salvation.**

So, in my future, I will no longer be as imperfect as I now am but will be all I'm supposed to be – and you will be too! I'll see my daughter Brittany and brother Chuck again. Easter is the declaration of the fact that our Lord is greater both than the evil and the death that is part of our world.

**When you believe that death is not the end of things and that the future is better than the past, then that will change deeply how you face disappointment, pain, difficulties, sickness, depression and uncertainty.**

There is much more to say – but I'll stop there. Paul experienced what I am praying you will experience today and then each day of your life, i.e., 1) that Jesus **loves you**, is ready to be **present** in your life, and that he is **powerful** enough to carry you through whatever happens in this imperfect world. And, 2) I am praying that **you will not be shaken by whatever happens in the present because you know what the future holds.**

On the first Good Friday, Jesus died for us – and, then on the first Easter, Jesus defeated death. He rose so that we might begin to live well now, with a life that even physical death cannot take away. Look at **2 Cor 4:14**: “*We know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus...*”

Therefore, let us this Easter 2019 declare this: Jesus is risen! He is risen indeed (3X)!!

The way this all starts is that you need to place your trust in Jesus. Bring him into your life. This means you need to acknowledge that you too have wrongs in our lives that need to be forgiven. It wasn't just the drunk driver who killed my brother who had issues in his life that needed to be dealt with. Right? I do too. So do you. But here is the good news for us all: Jesus alone lived the life we should have lived but we haven't – and he loved us so much that he died in our place – for our sins. We remembered that on Good Friday.

But, today is Easter: Death could not hold Jesus. Jesus rose again to offer us all new life now and eternal life that can never be taken away. What he asks you to do is to receive him into your life.

Here's what we're going to do now: We're going to have a song that will speak about the miracles that the risen Jesus can do in your life. The power of our risen Lord can lift you up when you feel you might never get up – can give you a new beginning when you think that you've come to the end. Pastors, prayer leaders, and church leaders, please come now to take your places in front of our Worship Center and up in the front of the balcony. **I want you to come to make a renewed commitment to Jesus today – or to take a first-time step toward Jesus.** Or, come **simply to have us pray for you.** If you feel like you're being squeezed and don't want to get squashed; like you've been knocked down and don't want to be knocked out, **you need to know the love, the presence and the power of Jesus in your life. You need to know a future that is better than your past.**

So, come and let us offer a brief prayer for you today. If you've never even come to know God at all through faith in Jesus, you come too. He is ready to connect with you. Jesus wants to meet you where you are.

So, come and simply say briefly what you need prayer for – and we will pray in the name of Jesus that you will find new hope and life through him. If you're sitting in the middle of the row, people will let you pass. In fact, those people will need prayer too so feel free to tell them to come with you. As the music begins – find the courage to stand up and step out and begin a new beginning in and through Jesus this Easter Sunday 2019.