

THE LIVING AND THE DEAD

Luke 24:1-8

For the last few months the Wuhan virus has consumed our world and our lives. It's the major news item and the most searched internet item. The world we know has been turned upside down. Soaring unemployment in an economic boom; financial markets plunging from record highs; businesses closed; schools closed; churches closed; store shelves empty; toilet paper used as currency; overwhelmed hospitals and health care workers; millions of people world-wide sick and thousands dead, with no fix or foreseeable end in sight. The first U.S. case of Corona virus was in Washington state on January 30. The first American death was February 29. As of 4-9-20 the Global totals were 1,498,833, with 89,733 deaths. U.S. totals were 434,861 cases and 14,814 deaths. Missouri has 3,327 cases and 58 deaths.

1. **Difficult Days.** We are living in **difficult days**. But these are **NOT** unprecedented times. Worldwide Diseases of the past, epidemics, pandemics, tyrannical governments and wars have all taken great tolls on our world historically. **Listen** to these words: "People are the same the world over. But in recent years I find there is an increasing problem I would call "hopelessness." Maybe it's because we get the world's troubles, problems, disasters, murders and wars, delivered instantaneously. But there's something more insidious. People in the most affluent societies are feeling desperate and hopeless. Perhaps the greatest psychological, spiritual, and medical need all people have is the need for hope. Famous cardiologist McNair Wilson wrote "Hope is the medicine I use more than any other; hope can cure nearly anything!" Years ago, Dr. Harold Wolff said "Hope, like faith and a purpose in life, is medicinal. This is not exactly a statement of belief, but a conclusion proven by meticulously controlled scientific experiment.

I hear voices from troubled hearts everywhere; "Our home is a war zone! Don't talk to me about world war. I want to know how to find peace in my family." "I'm a rape victim. How can I ever get over my terrible memories and my horrible fears?" "I've lost my job and may very well lose my home. Don't sing wall Street blues to me!" "How can I raise decent children in this world today? My kids are the most endangered species in the world today!" "We have a nice home and a couple of nice cars, so you'd think I would be happy. But I feel empty and hopeless. I don't believe my spouse loves me anymore, and I'm so lonely!"

This **generation** will pass through the fire. This is the generation – "under the gun." This is the tormented generation. This is the generation destined to live in the midst of crisis after crisis, danger upon danger, fear, **hopelessness**, and death. We are like a people living under the sentence of death, waiting for the date to be set. We sense that something terrible is about to happen. We know things cannot go on as they are. History has reached an impasse. We are now on a collision course. Something is about to give. We **know** it. We **feel** it. We **believe** it."

Do these words sound appropriate for our world **today**? **Billy Graham** actually wrote those words – in **1965**?! Like I said, these are **trying**, but **NOT** unprecedented times.

When praying about what to preach today, the Holy spirit kept bringing me back to a verse found in Luke's resurrection account, "**Why are you looking for the living among the dead.**" In the **midst** of a global pandemic, when people are sick and **dying**; in the midst of a **crisis** when literally million and millions of people are groping in the darkness of fear and **hopelessness**; we come here to **CELEBRATE** history's most **significant** reason for **HOPE**! The **resurrection** of Jesus Christ! That seems **SO** very appropriate to me!

2. **What's Easter About?** Easter is not about hunting brightly colored eggs, eating bags of Jelly Belly beans, wearing pastel dresses and hats, or enjoying a wonderful meal. **Easter** is about the death and **Resurrection** of Jesus Christ. It's about **Jesus** wanting a personal, intimate relationship with **you**. **This** year, Easter is a stark **reminder** of how **different** life is today! We're being asked to stay home and apart from family and friends; No hugging allowed at church; no communion; no sunrise worship; no laughing together; no Easter

eggs hunts But for others, today will be a much more **painful** reminder of loved ones who have **died** and are now so **desperately** missed.

Especially in times like these, **death** seems so **cruel**, so **harsh**, and so **final**. Well, folks, that's **exactly** what the disciples felt when they saw **Jesus**, whom they had left everything to follow, dying on a **cross**. They were **devastated**. **Death** had quenched their **hopes** and **dreams**; death had **crushed** their spirits. But if they had thought deeply, they would have **recalled** something significant. They would have remembered Jesus standing at the **tomb** of His close friend Lazarus. They would have remembered Jesus doing something **completely** unexpected: Jesus **wept** (**John 11:35**). Jesus **wept** because He knew **death** was **not** part of God's original **plan**. Humanity was not **meant** to grow old, not **meant** to **suffer** with diseases like Wuhan, not **meant** to die. But because of the **fall** of Adam and Eve, **sin** entered the human race, and **death** followed. And death spread to **all** of us. Jesus **wept** because **sin** broke His **heart**. But standing there at Lazarus' tomb, Jesus **also** delivered these words of eternal **HOPE**! "I am the resurrection and the life. **Anyone** who **believes** in me will live, even after dying." (**John 11:25**). Death is **not** the end. The **Resurrection** of Jesus Christ on Easter **proves** it. For **Jesus** followers, **Easter** means you will live forever in the presence of God. Easter offers **hope**, **even** in the midst of overwhelming **hopelessness**.

3. **The living and the dead. WATCH THIS:** When the women went to the tomb in **Luke 24** to anoint the body of Jesus with spices, they went looking for the **dead** among the **dead**. But **Jesus** wasn't **there**. He was **gone**. **Why?** Because **Jesus** wasn't **dead**. He was **alive**! Instead the women heard a **message** from God. "**Why do you look for the Living Among the Dead?**" That was the **question** the angels asked the women that morning so long ago. And that's the question you must answer today. Why do you look for the living among the dead? The women didn't expect to find the **living** among the **dead**. As far as **they** were concerned, Jesus was crucified and **dead** and all that **remained** was to anoint his body for final burial. The women didn't come to the tomb expecting to find a **living** Savior and Lord! They were looking for the **dead** among the **dead**. What they failed to **realize** was this: Jesus was **born to die—and** then to **rise** again. That was the **reason** for the **Incarnation**. On the cross, Jesus faced the **judgment** of God. He took God's **wrath** against you and me upon **Himself**. He cried out, "Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?" "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Jesus was bearing the sin of the world, **your** sins and **mine**, and **dying** in our place. **That's** why he **came**. The disciples of Jesus remind me of what my **Granny** used to say. She'd say "Danny boy, you're so **poor**, you can't even pay **attention!**" The disciples **obviously** weren't paying **attention!** Jesus **talked** about his **mission** all the time. From the **beginning** of time Jesus knew the end **goal** was the **cross** of Calvary. For three **years** Jesus explained, in a **plethora** of ways, **exactly** what he was going to do for mankind. From **before** the beginning of **time**, Jesus **planned** to give **his** life for **you**. From **before** the **beginning** of time Jesus **planned** to give **his** life for **me**. His life was not **taken** from Him; He **willingly** gave it up for **us**. Roman **spikes** did not hold Jesus to that cross. **Love** held Jesus to the cross! His **love** for **you** and **me** held him on the cross. Only the **voluntary** love of Jesus could satisfy the **heart** of God. **WOW!** Say it backwards with me – **WOW!**

4. **The Gifts of God.** What are you **looking** for today? **Why** are you here? Are you looking for a **dead** prophet or for a **living Lord**? The Christian **faith** is a faith that seeks a **living Lord**; not a **dead prophet**. If you **fail to celebrate** and **seek** a living **Christ** today; if you fail to worship the **Jesus** who is **alive** and **present** and **active** in the world at all **times**; in all **circumstances** and **situations**, then you have completely **missed** the **message** of **Easter**! Jesus isn't **dead**! He's **alive**! He is **risen**! He is Risen **indeed**! He is risen for **you** and he is risen for **me**! He's **Alive**! He's **Alive**! Say it **with** me – **HE'S ALIVE!**

I think it's so **very appropriate** that we celebrate Easter in the **spring** of the year. The **gray** death of winter is **behind** us. April **showers** have come and May **flowers** are on their heels. God **could** have made the whole world **flat** and **gray**; we wouldn't know the difference. But He **didn't**. He made the snowy **white** mountains, the expansive **blue** oceans, the **green** valleys, the **splashing** waves of the lake and **still** waters of the stream. He splashed **red** and **orange** in the sunrise and cast the sky in **blue** with puffy **white** clouds. He sends the **geese** flying back north, and wakes up the dormant fish. He gave us moose, and giraffes, and porcupines, and anteaters. God gave us a **beautiful** and **wonderful** world, my friends. Did He **have** to make the squirrel's red tail **furry**? Was He **obliged** to make the **melodious**, colorful birds sing? What about the antics of Cheri's

chickens? Or the **majesty** of thunder and the brilliance of lightning? Did God have to give us the wild **bluebonnets, dandelions, black-eyed Susans, foxgloves, wild lotus, and sunflowers**? Why did God give **roses** such a lovely **fragrance**? Why did he give **food** its wonderful **taste**? Could it be that God simply **loves** to see the **look of joy and love and happiness and satisfaction** on **your** face? God's **gifts** of love are **unmatched**!

If **we** love giving gifts to one another to show **our** love, how much **more** does God? If we imperfect, sinful humans love to give **gifts**, how much **more** does God, pure and **perfect** God, enjoy giving gifts to **us**? Jesus asked in **Matthew 7:11**, "If you hardhearted, sinful men know how to give good gifts to your children, won't your Father in heaven even more certainly give **good** gifts to those who ask him for them?" TLB

God's gifts to us shed **light** on God's **heart**; God's **good** and **generous** heart. Jesus' brother James tells us: "Every desirable and beneficial **gift** comes out of **Heaven**. The gifts are rivers of light cascading down from the Father of Light." **James 1:17 MSG**

Every gift in your life **reveals** God's love... but **no** gift reveals His love **more** than the **gifts** of the **Cross**. The gifts of **Jesus** for us on Easter, were not **wrapped** in **paper**, they were **wrapped** in the **love** and **passion** of Jesus. They were **not** placed around a **tree**, they were **placed** around a **Cross**. They were **not** covered with **ribbons**, they were **covered** in **blood**.

5. The gifts of the Cross. Much has been said about the **gift** of the **Cross itself**, but what about the **other** gifts? Like a detective, search the **scene** at the cross, and what do you find? What about the **beatings**? What about the **nails**? What about the **crown** of thorns? What about the **garments** stolen by the soldiers? What about the gall-soaked **sponge**. What about the **sign** above his head. What about two **crosses** beside Christ. What about the **linens** given for his burial? What about the **stone** that was rolled away? What about the empty **tomb**? What about the encouraging **message** of the angels? Have you taken time to open **these** gifts? Are you grateful for these gifts?

Jesus didn't **have** to give **any** of these gifts, you know? The **only act**, the only **required** act for our salvation was the **shedding** of **blood**, yet Jesus did much **more**. So **much** more. All these Divine **gifts** are **intended** to **stir** your heart in that **moment**, that split **second** when your **face** brightens, your **eyes** widen, your mind gladdens, and God will hear **you** ask in a trembling whisper, "**Jesus! You** did this for **me**?" "Lord, **WHY** did you **suffer** such agony for **me**? **Why** did you take that brutal **beating** for me? **Why** did you wear that crown of **thorns** for **me**? The **blood** streaming down your gentle face for **me**? Those **three** Roman spikes pierced your **flesh** for **me**? **Why** Jesus? **Why** did you do all that for **me**?"

The need for **blood** I understand. I see it throughout the Old **Testament**. I embrace Your **sacrifice**. God said there must be **atonement** for sin. But the **slapping** and **punching** and **spitting** in your face; the bitter **sponge**; the cat of nine tails **whip**; the flesh piercing **spear**? Did it **have** to be a cruel Roman **crucifixion** on that old rugged **Cross**?

Wasn't there an **easier** way for You to **die** than hanging for six hours between life and death, all because of a betrayer's sin? My sin? My sin!

Today, Lord Jesus! Today, I just have to know! On this Easter day, of ALL Easter Days, I have to know! Did YOU do ALL this for ME?"

Do we **DARE** ask that question today? Do we dare **think** such thoughts? **YES! YES!** A thousand times **YES!** As **believers**, let's allow the sacrificial **love** of Jesus to **wash** over us today. Let's **focus** our **hearts** on the **gifts** of Jesus at the **Cross** and return that avalanche of love with **faith, love, and devotion** to Jesus.

There's a great **movie** called **Chocolat**. In the movie, a young woman comes to a small French town, mystically arriving like Mary Poppins accompanied by a strong wind. She opens a small chocolate shop at the beginning of Lent, against the advice of the mayor, who rigidly enforces the rigid rules of the church regarding **abstinence** from sweets during this season of penitence. We soon learn the rules are about more than chocolate.

The rules **repress** life in the village; the freedom to be joyful, to give and receive love, to be creative, and to embrace life. But the young woman, Vianne, persists and slowly her chocolates work magic in the village, bringing courage to the timid, love to the unloved, and **hope** to the despairing.

The mayor angrily decides to destroy the chocolate shop. On Easter Eve he sneaks into the shop intent on destruction, but the **chocolates**...the **chocolates look** so **good**, they **smell** so **good**, and he thinks to himself,

just one **taste** won't matter...but **one** taste leads to **another**, and **another**, and soon the mayor is rolling in chocolates and weeping as he realizes that his soul is dead, and there in the midst of his chocolate binge, he “**comes to**” it's not **Lent** that matters, it's the **resurrection** of Jesus that matters. The mayor falls asleep in the shop, buried in chocolates, and as the sun rises on **Easter** morning, the **bells** ring out their **joyful** song; “Christ the Lord is risen today, Allelujah!”

The **moral** of Chocolat is that **life** is for the **living**, **not** the **dead**, and despite the **best** efforts of a hard and cold world, life **always triumphs** over **death**. **Live** life to the **fullest**. **Live** your life **loving** and **serving** your risen **Savior** and Lord, **Jesus Christ**. **Rejoice** in the **goodness** of life! Christ is **risen**! He is Risen **indeed**!

6. **Three Crosses**. Because of the resurrection, Christ's **offer** of **forgiveness** for **sin** is a **done** deal. It was **accomplished** at Calvary. But there's one **last** point I want to make. There were **three** crosses on Calvary that Good Friday 2000 years ago. Have you ever **thought** about that? **Why** were there **three** crosses? **Why two** crosses along with **Christ's** cross? **Why not 5?** **Why not 12?** Have you ever **wondered** why **Jesus** was crucified on the cross in the **center**? **Why not put Him** on the far **right**, or (Heaven forbid) on the far **left**?

WATCH THIS! I'm **convinced** those **three** crosses were **not** just a **coincidence**, or happenstance. I believe the **two** crosses on either side of Jesus, with the two **other** men, **symbolize** one of God's absolute **GREATEST** gifts! They **represent** the gift of **CHOICE**! Look at these **two** men for a moment. They obviously have a great deal in **common**. They were both **convicted** by the same **judicial** system. They were both found **guilty** of their crimes. They were both sentenced to **death**. They were surrounded by the same **crowd**. They were **crucified** next to the same Jesus. In fact, they both **begin** with the same derisive **sarcasm** of Christ. **Matthew 27:44** says “Even the revolutionaries who were crucified with him **ridiculed** him in the same way.” But something **happened**. Listen to the words of **Luke 23:39-43** “One of the criminals hanging beside him scoffed, “So you're the Messiah, are you? Prove it by saving yourself—and us, too, while you're at it!” But the other criminal protested, “Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong.” Then he said, “Jesus, **remember** me when you come into your Kingdom.” And Jesus replied, “I assure you, today you will be with me in paradise.”

Books have been written about the **penitent** thief and his “death bed prayer” for forgiveness, and it is a **vital** theological doctrine. But virtually **NOTHING** is said about the criminal who **DIDN'T** repent! What about **him**? What about **him**, Jesus? **Why didn't** you invite him to **join** you in heaven, Jesus? **Why didn't** you try to **persuade** him to **repent**, Jesus?

HERE'S THE BLUF! There are **times** when God sends **thunder** and lightning events into our lives **STIR** us into His kingdom! There are times when God sends great **blessing** events into our lives to **LURE** us into his kingdom! But there are **also** many times when God sends **NOTHING** except His **still**, small voice as He **honors** us with the **FREEDOM** to **CHOOSE** where we spend our **eternity**!!!

From the beginning of **creation**, God has given us **NO** greater **privilege** than that of **CHOICE**! Think **again** about the criminal who **REPENTED**. We know very **little** about him. But we **do** know this: He had made some very bad **choices** throughout his life. He likely **chose** the wrong **crowd**, the wrong **friends**, the wrong **morals**, the wrong **behavior**, the wrong **lifestyle**. **BUT** – would you consider his life a **waste**? Is he spending his eternity reaping the fruits of all those **bad** choices he made? **No!** Just the opposite! He is in **heaven** to this day, enjoying the fruit of the **ONE good** choice he made! In the **end**, all his **bad** choices were **redeemed** by a solitary **GOOD** one. He chose **Jesus**!

So let's get to the hog killin! No matter how many bad choices you have made in the past, they can be redeemed; they **ARE** redeemed by one single solitary **GOOD** choice. The choice to follow Jesus! If you've never made that choice before, will you make that choice right now? Not only will your life be impacted for eternity but your life on earth will have real meaning and true purpose. In **Revelation 3:20** Jesus says “Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in.”

The most important **CHOICE** you will **ever** make in your **entire** life is the **choice** to say **yes** or **no** to **Jesus**. Will you say “**YES**” to Him right now? Give your **heart** to Jesus. **Admit** your need, because of your sin. **Believe** that Jesus is the only remedy to your sin problem. He died to pay for your sins, he rose from the dead, and He is alive today as the **ONLY** way to have eternal life. **Open** your heart, **confess** your sin and pray for

forgiveness, **accept** Jesus as your redeemer, and **commit** yourself to love and live for Him. Why are you looking for the living among the dead? Jesus is alive! Let Christ Change your heart today.

Join us as we allow Jesus to change us from the inside out, by singing – **Change My Heart O God**.
Prayer for protection of the flock and for living for Jesus.