

Restored

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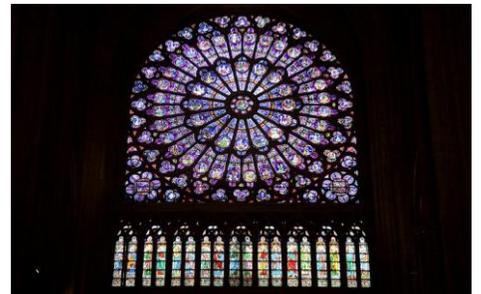
Restored¹ **Easter, 2019**

If you've been watching the news this week you are aware of the devastating fire that burned much of the Notre Dame cathedral. It's surreal to see the pictures of this beautiful place of worship being engulfed in flames. At the time of the fire, work was being done on restoration of the church, and they suspect it was some kind of worker accident or electrical short that started the fire.



Has anyone here had the privilege of having been to visit Notre Dame? It is an incredible place; you look at it from the outside and, unless you are an architect, you wonder what those arched things on the side are (what are they? Flying buttresses!). Then you walk

inside and, regardless of your spiritual beliefs, you can't help but be in awe, with a strong sense that there is something deeply spiritual that is happening inside. It is breathtaking; the stained glass Rose Window – 33 feet in diameter, the statues, the high ceilings that are made to draw your gaze heavenward, the building's footprint being in the shape of a giant cross; not to mention the works of art and religious artifacts that the building houses.



And then to see the pictures and video of that roof and spire being destroyed; it's so tragic.

The building of the cathedral itself originally began in 1163 and it took 200 years to complete it. Can you imagine? We have plans to update our sanctuary soon; I hope that doesn't take 200 years!

The Notre Dame Cathedral has been there for almost 900 years, and has over 13 million visitors each year. The bishop has said it will be closed for at least six years. The spiritual, cultural, and financial toll that this fire has taken on Paris simply cannot be measured. The French president is saying that they will rebuild it within

¹ All Scriptures, unless indicated, or from the NIV translation of the Bible; *The New International Version* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011)

five years, but experts are saying that it will take at least 15 years to restore it. Nevertheless, the people of France are determined to see it restored fully. Over a billion dollars has already come in for its restoration.

This is a vivid example of what we are talking about today on this Easter Sunday. Easter is all about restoration, and we are beginning a series today called, "Restored."

As valuable as Notre Dame is, no building is worth more than a single human life, and every single one of us – every one of our lives – has suffered far more severe devastation than Notre Dame experienced. Unlike a cathedral, we were created to last forever – forever! Far longer than a thousand year old church. And yet the fire of sin has consumed our lives and brought death with it. The restoration of a single person cannot even be measured, or ever accomplished, humanly speaking.

So when we talk about being restored, it implies that something used to be one way, but now it is not that way, so it needs to be restored to what it used to be. And that, my friend, is what Easter is all about: God restoring your life.

For some of you here this morning, this comes as very welcome news when you think about your life. Maybe you are struggling with a medical diagnosis that is not good news. Maybe you wonder how you are going to pay your rent or put food on your family's table. Maybe it's deeper than that, for you; maybe you battle with Post Traumatic Stress from some horrible things in your life. Maybe you live with the shame and trauma of abuse, or maybe you are the abuser. Maybe you struggle with some kind of addiction, whether to chemicals or food or pornography or something else. Maybe your marriage is a mess, or maybe you have a history of bad relationships. So this talk of being restored is really appealing to you and you are anxious to know what it means and what it will look like – there's something in you that hopes against hope that it could be true. I can tell you that you are going to find tremendous relief and healing in your life that will start today on this resurrection Easter Sunday.

But for some of us in this room, it's very possible that you are sitting here this morning and wondering, "what needs to be restored? My life is going good. I've got a good job, a good spouse or relationships, my kids are semi-normal. I've got a boat in the driveway and I keep my lawn mowed."

Well, good for you! But let me tell you something, and I'm asking you to please consider this: if that is you, but you are not a devoted Christian, you are *missing* it, my friend. What you are experiencing is *not* the kind of restored, abundant life that could be yours. Honestly, even if you'd consider yourself modestly rich, you are living in *spiritual* poverty. You could live with so much *more* peace and strength and joy and contentment in your life that you haven't even experienced yet.

Are you familiar with Stevie Wonder, the incredibly talented singer and songwriter? Maybe you know that he became blind shortly after he was born. Someone once asked him in an interview if he missed being able to see. His response was, "I guess you don't miss what you never had." For all his success, he had no idea how amazing it is to be able to see; he doesn't know colors, doesn't know what trees and

oceans look like. When you are sighted, it's hard to imagine life without it. I'm just going to shoot straight with you right from the start: if you are not a Christian, you have no idea how much wonder and beauty and how many amazing things you are missing. For those of us whose lives have been restored by Christ, we can't imagine how you could be content without it. So I hope you'll give me the honor of considering what we're talking about this morning.

If in fact we *are* needing to be restored, then...

1. What *used to be*?

What were our lives supposed to be like originally? Wouldn't it be great to go back in time and find out what things were supposed to be like in the beginning?

Well, we have a sort of time machine that we can look into, and it's called the Bible. The Bible describes what life was like for us at the beginning – it's in the book of Genesis. Now, I'm not interested in discussing the difference between creation and evolution or theistic evolution or any of those things; that is an entirely different conversation that isn't relevant here this morning. What I am interested in is peering back into time to see what God had originally intended for us – what life was like for us once, because if we are needing to be restored, then we'll know what life once was and what we can be restored to.

The book of Genesis, the first book of the Bible in the Old Testament, first describes God creating light, dark, the heavens and sky and earth, the fish and birds and animals and plants, and in all of that, he stands back each time and says, "This is good!" Then God said:

"Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
(Genesis 1:26)

Now the word "rule" can also be translated "shepherd." It can also mean, "to follow a religious rule of order or practice." My point is that this verse doesn't give us permission to exploit and abuse creation; instead we were created to steward and shepherd creation as an act of worship to God – to live in such a way that we were sustained by creation, not destroyers of creation. Our work was to care for and receive from creation for our sustenance.

Then it says:

"So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them..." (Genesis 1:27)

So our original design is that we are to be *godly* – not gods, but *like* God. Then it goes on to describe a beautiful garden with rivers and plants and trees and flowers and two significant fruit trees – one that is the tree of life, and one that is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God instructed Adam and Eve – the first couple – to eat all they wanted from the first tree, which means God intended them to live

forever and never die, but the second one, he told them to *not* eat from. And here's why: his desire was that we would remain innocent; we wouldn't know any evil at all. So ignorance would be bliss, because everything was good and that's all we'd know. Humans were so innocent, that they weren't even clothed, and it didn't bother them at all; there was no sense of shame and need to hide themselves.

Of course, God loves people so much that he knew love requires a choice, and so he gave us the *choice* to love him, not simply be robots. That's what that forbidden tree was all about. Free will is a characteristic of God, and humans alone in all creation have that kind of freedom to choose – so God gave us choice. It's part of what it means that he made us in his image.

The original existence was so amazing that the story even describes God walking in the Garden in the cool of the day (3:8), wanting to walk with humans.

So what do we know from this description of our original design? We know a lot, actually. We know that the ***creation would sustain us***. That our work was worship and it was pleasure, not stressful, and that everything we needed would be provided for. We know that ***we had perfect health and would never die***. There would never have been anything like cancer, or ALS or Alzheimer's or AIDS, and there wasn't anything like colds or flu. How many of you are experiencing allergy season right now? Yea – this is sounding pretty good to you right now, isn't it?

Even more than our health, we were in ***an unhindered relationship with God***. There was nothing that came between him and us. The idea of God being vengeful, or being a judge, was not even part of the equation. We were in such close relationship with him that we went for evening walks with him!

And it wasn't just with God; we had ***healthy relationships with each other***. We were able to always speak our minds; we accepted one another and were loved and accepted by each other openly and without hesitation. We were totally honest, respectful, and loving with each other, all the time. We never had to wonder what someone else's motives were.

Because of all these things, we were able to live in ***complete contentedness***. That doesn't mean we didn't learn or grow or better ourselves or each another; it means that we lived peaceful lives, always content and grateful for what we had.

That all sounds great, so ... what happened?

2. What is it ***now***?

Well, we learn in the narrative that another character entered the scene – an antagonist, described as the serpent. The serpent convinced the first human couple to disobey God, to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They thought that by doing so, they could become Gods themselves.

The first humans decided they wanted to be Gods themselves and chose to disobey God and reject his love, and that act threw everything off kilter.

In Genesis chapter three it describes God going for his usual evening walk in the Garden, *looking for people*. God never had to look for them before; they were always available to each other all the time. But this time the people were hiding; they had shame. They felt naked. God asked them why they were hiding (even though he knew they ate the fruit). The man blamed the woman. It's her fault! The woman blamed the serpent. It's the serpent's fault! Isn't that the way we are? Always wanting to blame someone else?

We live in a world of excuses. Readers Digest compiled some excuses that people have given for why they didn't do their homework:

"Another student fell in a lake, and I jumped in to rescue him but unfortunately my homework drown."

"My father had a nervous breakdown and he cut my homework up to make paper dolls."

"I didn't do it, because I didn't want the other kids in the class to look bad."

College professors say that most relatives seem to die around exam time...someone actually did a study and found out that a common excuse of college students is often to claim the death of family members around exam times. So if you have a kid in college, you might be in danger! And the person who students claim dies the most is the grandmother. Poor nana!

We haven't changed much since the Garden – still blaming everyone else.

But God holds them directly accountable for their sin, and told the woman:

"I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." (Genesis 3:16)

My wife was so amazing when our boys were born. I have no idea how she managed through that kind of pain. She's so little, and all three of our boys were between 8 and 11 pounds. They arrived so fast that there wasn't even the choice of any kind of pain medication; the first one arrived in a half hour! The last one was a few hours.

But I think the consequence of pain in childbirth didn't only apply to *birthing* kids; I think it includes *raising* them! I remember when they were babies, wondering if we'd ever sleep again in our lives!

Then there's the other part of this verse. Essentially, God is saying, "You will long for a healthy, equal relationship with a man but he's going to try to have power over you." Man, don't we see this still today? Despite the great work of women's rights and all that's been gained toward equal pay and respect for women, we *still* see this playing out today. That's a big part of what's behind the #metoo movement. Men are *still* the majority of abusers. Don't misunderstand; the Bible doesn't say that this imbalance was what God *wanted*; God didn't *create* the curse; he said these are the inevitable consequences from men's and women's choices, and God said this with an incredibly heavy heart. It's the *last* thing he wanted.

Then there's the man. God said:

"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." (Genesis 3:17-19)

In other words, life is going to be hard now. You'll have to work hard to get what you need out of the world. More than that, all your hard work won't make you stronger; it will eventually lead to death.

So how do we see that playing out today? The Bible makes it very clear – this same wasting disease called sin and death is something that all of us suffer from. We've inherited it, and we're also guilty of it ourselves. Left to ourselves, we *still* strive to be the God of our own life and master of our own destiny. Write the word "sin" in your notes; now circle the middle letter. The middle of sin is "I" – "I want to be in charge, I want to do whatever I want, I don't care about how it affects God or anyone else..." Sin is an incurable blood disease that we all have:

"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."
(Romans 3:23, nlt)

So we *still* have the effects today, and they are the opposite of what God wanted. There is ***pollution, scarcity of resources*** to the point that we are depleting the world and damaging the climate. We are always battling ***disease, sickness, defects, and death***. We've all got loved ones who have struggled with mental illness, with cancer, with diseases, and, last time I checked the research, the death rate in this world was *still* hovering right at somewhere around 100%. Right?

Worse yet, we have a ***broken relationship with God***; we deny his existence altogether, or we are aware that God is there, but we fear him or hide ourselves from him and each other because deep down we are ashamed. We feel naked around him. So we struggle with shame, with poor self-esteem, lack of confidence, guilt.

And that insecurity and broken relationship with God infects every other relationship so that we experience ***relational dysfunction***. In its extreme it shows up in abusive relationships, but beyond those extremes, the dysfunction shows up in little ways too, like dishonesty, falsehood, gossip, and hiding our true selves from each other, never fully disclosing who we are even in the most trusted relationships.

On top of that, we are constantly hit with ***stress and anxiety*** in our jobs, in our homes, in our relationships, in life. We take vacation and come back to work exhausted. We don't ever seem to have enough time in the day to get things done. There are always bills to pay, expectations and deadlines to meet, and things left undone. These lead to all kinds of health issues like heart attacks, cancer, migraines, ulcers, anxiety disorders - on and on.

So you see – even if you came in here thinking your life was okay, it's really not, is it? Life kinda sucks.

Aren't you glad you came to church on Easter Sunday to hear all this bad news? Well, stay with me, because it wouldn't really be Good News if there wasn't bad news, too, right? The Bible says:

"The wages that sin pays are death (*bad news*), but (*Good News*) God's gift is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 6:23, ceb)

The results, the consequences of sin are all that stuff we just talked about. The heart of all the problems we just rehearsed is *sin*. But the good news is that in Jesus Christ, God set about to correct things – to restore our lives and relationships. It has *always* been God's desire to make things right for us, even though we messed things up. Way back in the Old Testament God said:

"As for you, I'll come with healing, curing the incurable, because they all gave up on you and dismissed you as hopeless..." (Jeremiah 30:17)

This is a sentiment that God shares *time and time again* all through the Old Testament.

So when it comes to all these things we experience...

3. What ***changed*** it?²

From the beginning, God had a plan to restore us. Several centuries before Jesus arrived, the Old Testament foretold of Jesus Christ as the "suffering servant" who would restore mankind. He would be "despised and rejected by others; a man of suffering" (Isaiah 53:3). The chapter concludes, "He exposed himself to death. He was counted among the rebels. He bore the sins of many and interceded for rebels." (Isaiah 53:12, nlt) His crucifixion fulfilled the prophecy that, through His suffering, humanity would be restored.

As a sacrifice, Christ paid the penalty of death that we all deserve because of our sin. The Bible says about Jesus:

"Now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice." (Hebrews 9:26, nlt)

Christ's death removed the penalty that humanity deserved – he didn't deserve it, but he paid it anyway. The Apostle John says:

"This is real love – not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins." (1 John 4:10, nlt)

To restore us, Christ's death overcame humanity's separation from God, bringing us back into a healthy and loving relationship with Him. Paul said:

"All these new things are from God who brought us back to himself through what Christ Jesus did. And God has given us the privilege of urging everyone to come into his favor and be reconciled to him. For God was in Christ,

² <https://tifwe.org/better-than-new-gods-grand-restoration-plan/>

restoring the world to himself, no longer counting men's sins against them but blotting them out. This is the wonderful message he has given us to tell others." (2 Corinthians 5:18-19, tlb)

Finally, Christ's death freed us sinners from the bondage to sin. Christ paid the ultimate price to ensure humanity's liberation. Jesus said of Himself:

"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:45).

Humanity is cleansed, made whole, *restored*, reconciled to God, and on the journey of removing the power of sin and death in our lives! These are all results of what Jesus Christ did, *which provided restoration of God's original design for us*.

But listen: if it was *only* Christ's death, then his death would have no greater impact than anybody else's. But here's the thing: what righted everything that got thrown off when sin first entered the world, the thing that put us on the path to restoration *began* with his death, but was made complete with his resurrection. My friends *that* is why we celebrate Easter; *that* is why we worship on Sunday every week – because Sunday was the day Jesus rose from the dead! Easter makes all the difference.

Paul, in his letter to the Romans said about Jesus:

"Who through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead: Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 1:4)

A central significance of the resurrection is that through it, Jesus conquered death. He triumphed over *every* force that opposed Him, over every wrong that entered the world through sin. Paul, referring to the resurrection, wrote:

"Death has been swallowed up in victory ... Thanks be to God, He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Corinthians 15:54-57)

When Christ rose from the dead, He conquered death and restored abundant life to be available to humanity. Through Christ's resurrection, He restored God's original design for true, full life for us.

Unlike the first man, Adam, who disobeyed and brought death and separation, the Bible calls Jesus, the "last Adam," because *by obedience* he restored God's kingdom (Romans 5:19; 1 Corinthians 15:45). The Bible says:

"[Jesus] humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." (Philippians 2:8, ceb)

Christ's *obedience* undid Adam's *disobedience* and restored what Adam lost. Through Christ, everything has been restored; even the earth will be made brand new some day (see Revelation 21:2)!

So my guess is that maybe you've heard that before; maybe as I went through all that your eyes glazed over and you started thinking about honey-glazed ham that's waiting for you at home! So let's get to the point...

4. What *does it mean* for me *now*?

Honestly – what difference does all that make? Is it just some old religion that makes no difference today?

That might be true, except for the fact that Christ *is* alive right now; he rose from the dead and he is alive and present right here and now through the Holy Spirit, trying to tell you how much he loves you and how much is available for you, *if* you will let him restore you to real life. Even the Bible says:

“If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins.”
(1 Corinthians 15:17)

And that makes sense, doesn't it? If Christ hadn't been raised from the dead, all we'd have is yet another empty religion. And the problem with religion is that it is all man-made. All the religions of the world – I don't care which one it is – all of them are mankind's attempts to reach up to God. You've got to pray enough, do enough good deeds, chant enough, make enough sacrifices, give enough money, or even die for the cause and then maybe you'll be good enough for God. All religion is our attempts to reach up to God. But *Christianity is God reaching down to us*, becoming one of us, dying in our place, and then rising from the dead so that we could be restored to original life, in unhindered relationship with God and able to work toward healthy relationships with each other.

Jesus said:

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying.” (John 11:25, nlt)

He said:

“I came so that they could have life – indeed, so they could live life to the fullest.” (John 10:10, ceb)

It has always been God's desire to restore this for you. Jesus said:

“For it is my Father's will that all who see his Son and believe in him should have eternal life. I will raise them up at the last day.” (John 6:40, nlt)

This kind of restored life means that you now begin to experience peace, no shame or guilt, less stress and anxiety and the physical toll that takes on your body, you begin to live in such a way that you honor and respect and accept and love people, so your relationships become healthier. You once again have unhindered access and relationship to God who loves you, not a god you should be afraid of. It means that you begin to care about the world around you – people and creation. It means that someday, even though you experience death here, you will live forever beyond that – finally, totally free of all the sin and dysfunction of this broken world.

That's why the Bible says:

“We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. For if we have been united with him in a death

like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his.”
(Romans 6:4-5)

This kind of restored life is available to you, if you will accept Christ’s death in your place, and exchange your broken life for his full life. It means that you start a new life, living with and for Christ, no longer living for yourself.

That’s what the Apostle Paul meant when he said:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20)

So on this Easter Sunday, while we celebrate and worship Jesus Christ for his resurrection, it is really about *you*; what will *you* do about the resurrection? Will you step into this amazing, restored life, or will you walk out of here, back into your life of spiritual poverty?

I can’t bear the thought of you leaving without the opportunity to exchange your life for God’s restored life for you – like exchanging blindness for sight. So I’m asking the worship team to come up and prepare to sing, because as they sing, you will have the chance to step out in faith and walk into this restored life.

We’ve planned a way for you to make that faith statement: in a moment as we sing, you can come forward from where you are, come to the front, and pick up one of these simple, hand-carved wooden crosses, and take it back to your seat with you. It’s yours. I’ll explain the significance of these crosses after our song. By coming forward, it’s a simple action, but the most significant choice you will ever make. By coming forward, you are saying you want to live in this resurrection life. You may not be a Christian. Maybe you would say you are, but you are not living in resurrection restoration. Come forward, step into this being restored life. As we sing, please come. And I’ll tell you what – if you come, the *least* that is going to happen is that you are going to sense how incredibly loved you are by God and by this church. Not such a bad thing, is it?

Pray

Let’s sing.

Closing Comments:

Again, the Bible says, “If anyone is in Christ, he or she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.” You are brand new!

I told you I’d let you know about these crosses. Keep this by your Bible, that you will want to read each day. And then, as you pray each day, you can hold this in your hand, turning it over as you pray, to remind you of the new life Christ died and rose to give you.

These crosses are carved from wood from the prunings of olive trees around Bethlehem, the place where Jesus was born. And the sale of these crosses allows the poor, who carve them, to make a sustainable living. So we purchased these for you

to have, knowing that the price doesn't even come close to the price that Jesus paid for your life to be restored.

If by coming forward you said yes to a restored life in Christ, please join us next Sunday for a baptism celebration! God tells us that he expects us to show our faith community that we've been restored – washed clean – by being baptized. I strongly urge you to solidify your decision by joining us next week. All you need to do is come next Sunday for a brief class at 9:00am and the service at 10:00am, and bring a towel and change of clothes.

Stand and let's sing together before we go out into this newly restored life.