



## TIME OF GRACE®

# Jesus #nofilter: Jesus Means Life After Death for You Study Notes

## Summary

Easter is a big deal because it answers two of life's most important questions: What do we personally do with Jesus? How do we personally face a world filled with death? Jesus provided the answer to both questions by saying he is the Resurrection and the Life, and that gives us hope. Pastor Mike concludes this series that looks at the offensive, unfiltered, hard teachings of Jesus.

- 2 Big Questions — What about \_\_\_\_\_? What about \_\_\_\_\_?
- Easter is a big deal because \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1 Corinthians 15:3-6 — For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, 5 and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. 6 After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.
- Easter is a big deal because \_\_\_\_\_.
- John 11:25-26 — Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; 26 and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

## Points to Ponder

1. Do you know someone who is scared to die? Share this message with them, asking God to give them the peace that comes from believing in Jesus.
2. Read the entire story of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. You can find it in John 11:1-44.
3. Jesus once said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). List at least four blessings of being a generous giver of your time and money.
4. Do you have our special Good Friday and Easter Sunday services on your calendar? Have you started to pray about whom you might invite? If not, today is the best day to start.

## Homework for Next Week

Read Genesis 1, Luke 5:15-16

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Jesus #nofilter: Jesus Means Life After Death for You**  
1 Corinthians 15:3-6, John 11:25-26  
March 31, 2024

*Pastor Mike Novotny*

Let me tell you right from the start my big idea for today. Here it is. Easter is a big deal. You probably knew that, even before I said it. When you woke up this morning, if you're watching at home, you felt this too. Even though it's Sunday, it's not an average Sunday and I bet you could feel it. Maybe the decorations in your neighborhood, maybe the Easter baskets the kids were searching for, maybe the Easter decor, maybe the Easter dresses, the Easter outfits, there's Easter chocolate, there's Starburst jellybeans, it is a great time of year because the best thing is, you know, Easter brunch is so, so, so, so close.

I was thinking the other day, what other major holiday celebrates breakfast quite like Easter? So, I love Easter, and then you come to church and you realize it's not a normal church Sunday either. Maybe you could smell it with the Easter flowers here, maybe you could sense it, like, "Why does Pastor Mike have his shirt tucked in?" One day a year, folks, one day a year. Something uncomfortable to honor the name of Jesus. So, that's Easter. We got donuts in the lobby. If you're watching at home, I'm so sorry. We can give you Jesus, but we can't give you those free donuts.

So, it's a different Sunday, a better Sunday. There's an anticipation in the air. You feel it from the first beat of the music, and that's no accident, because Easter is a big deal. But today I want to propose to you that Easter isn't primarily a big deal because of the amazing brunch, or the Easter dresses, or the donuts in the lobby, or the extra attendance. What makes Easter so amazing from a Christian point of view is that it gives us the answer to two of life's most important questions.

If you're taking notes in your program, I'd love for you to write this down. The two most important questions I think that you need to answer personally are this, number one, what about Jesus? Number two, what about death? It's a big question. What do you personally do with Jesus? I'm not sure how much you personally know about Jesus, but when one of Jesus' best friends named John recorded in his book the stuff that Jesus said, Jesus refused to let people be kind of Christian. Right? The stuff that came out of His mouth did not allow you spiritually to sit on the fence of faith. Claims he made were so big and so demanding and so amazing that back in the first century, either you were all in to worship and follow Jesus, or you were so put off and appalled by the things that Jesus would say.

Have you heard some of the things that Jesus said? Like, "I am the bread that came down from Heaven. Eat me, believe in me and your soul will be well fed. Take a diet from me and your very soul will die." That was Jesus. And he said, "I am the light of

the world. Follow me, stay close by my side, believe in me and you will see the world as it really is. You'll see how God is, you'll see how you are, you will see the truth. Walk away from me with your own independent spirituality and you will be in darkness deceived and just guessing when it comes to God." Jesus said that too. He said, "I'm the good shepherd and y'all are like sheep. Stay right here by my ankles and I will lay down my life to protect you from the wolf. Stray from me to live out your truth and you are dead meat." He said, "I'm like a vine and you're like branches. Remain stuck to me in faith and you will produce fruit, a life that is pleasing to God. Separate yourself from me and you will shrivel, and God will not be happy with a single thing you do as good as it might seem to you." You know, Jesus said, "I am the way. You want to get to God? You want something good to happen to you after you die? I am not a way, I'm not an option, I am the way." He said, "No one comes to God, the Father, except through me." When Jesus said stuff like that, it forced you to answer the question, what do you do about Jesus? I mean, you can't give him knuckles and, kind of, respect him. You either have to think, "Woah. No, that's too much." Or you have to be all in to acknowledge him as God, and King, and Savior, and Lord.

And today, the same question remains, what do you do with the real, unfiltered, unedited, unadulterated Jesus of Nazareth? Well, I would suggest that if you know what happened on that first Easter, you can answer that important question. And you can answer this question: what about death? My youngest daughter didn't want me to tell you this part. My kids, because they're pastor's kids, they get the early release edition of the Easter sermon. It's like the premium subscriber, except they don't subscribe, and I just say it to them anyway. And I said to my youngest daughter, my 13-year-old, Maya, "Maya, here's what I'm thinking about saying at the start of the Easter sermon, 'You're all going to die.'" And Maya said, "Dad... Don't." It's Easter, it's supposed to be happy. So, I try to justify myself, I said, "Well, Easter is about the resurrection of the dead, how can I talk about the resurrection of the dead if I don't talk about people being dead?" To which she responded, "Dad, don't."

And my kid was kind of right. You know, on Good Friday, we tend to talk about death and sin and the serious stuff and Easter Sunday is for the joy and the happiness and the hope. But I'm kind of right too. Death is something that all of us are going to face no matter how fit we are. Some of us are closer than others but all of us are mortal. And we can try to avoid it and distract ourselves from it as we scroll on our phones but sooner or later, you're going to have to face it. What do you do with death? Capital D, death, your last breath, how do you face it? And all those lowercase d deaths, those little losses, the things that you had last year but not this year. How do you get through that with hope? How do you cope?

But the fact is, some of you on this Easter Sunday are missing things that you had last year. A loved one who was at the Easter table, a job that you loved, a pet that used to run around and eat up the Easter scraps. Sometimes marriages don't make it from Easter to Easter, sometimes good health doesn't survive from year to year. You're going to face it as much as I do. My question is how do you deal with that? How do you face the reality of this death filled world without just getting lost and

depressed? How do you have this hope and joy that Christians talk about in a world where this is all around us?

Today, I propose to you that Easter answers that question too. So, as much as I'm tempted to spend the next 20 minutes talking to you about my favorite parts of Easter brunch, I could. Hint, it would start with cinnamon roll, and it would end with another cinnamon roll. But I'm going to just leave the brunch and the bunnies for some other time. Today, I want to answer those two big questions and use Easter as the proof.

What do you personally do with Jesus? And how do you personally face a world filled with death. So, let me remind you today with an open Bible why Easter is such a big deal. Alright, grab a pen. Let's jump into point one. Why is Easter a big deal? Here's what I want you to write down, Easter is a big deal because news flash, Jesus stopped being dead.

Do you know the history? Thursday night, Jesus is gathered with his closest friends and then one of them named Judas leaves and stabs Jesus in the back. He sells him out for a handful of money. He leads the soldiers to Jesus' private prayer place where he's arrested in the middle of the night. They put on this totally, unjust trial, and he's condemned. And by 9:00 A.M. on that Friday morning, he's on a cross, and by 3:00 P.M., Jesus of Nazareth is dead. When I said dead, I mean physically, biologically, no breath, no heartbeat, no brain waves, dead.

I was reminded of the grittiness of that moment when I read an archeological news story from 2017. Did you hear about this? Sixty miles north of London in a little town called Fenstanton, archaeologists are digging, they find this full skeleton of a man in a grave that dated all the way back to the Roman empire. They find the skull, they find the ribs, they find the arms, they find the legs, and what do they find smashed through this man's heel bone? A two-inch nail. He was a victim of crucifixion. It reminded me of something that I saw with my own eyes, a picture that I took in Jerusalem. Another man that they found outside of the city, the nail bent so the Romans couldn't pull it out. They left it in his bone.

Can you imagine what it would be like to be crucified? In fact, when they examined this man's bones North of London, they saw signs of major trauma, and maybe one of the more traumatizing things, right next to where the nail was, was an indentation. The Romans had tried to pound the nail through, it wouldn't go, like a screw in your wall, they pulled it out, they tried again and killed him on a cross. And that's how Jesus ended up dead.

Can you imagine what he went through for us? Let's try to just feel a glimpse of it. Would you put your hand out like this for a second, all of you? Why don't you take your thumb and put it right here between the bones and would you push, just for two seconds, as hard as you can? Jesus, who was truly human, who came down from Heaven with flesh and blood and bones and nerves. The Romans didn't push, they pierced. But the Bible says that Jesus did that and he actually chose that out of

inexplicable love for people like us. Sin was serious in the eyes of God, there was a price that had to be paid; and instead of sending us the check, Jesus picked up the bill. He came down from Heaven, took on flesh and blood as a human being, and he died on a cross. He died there for the forgiveness of my sins and yours.

And if that seems too good to be true, then on the third day, just like he said, Jesus stopped being dead. That's why the Christian faith did not take centuries and centuries to develop some big ideas about the resurrected Jesus. Now, let me read to you 1 Corinthians 15, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance, that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas," another name for Peter, "And then he appeared to the twelve," twelve apostles. "After that, Jesus appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep."

So, let me start with the familiar faces here in church. I know a lot of you who are incredibly committed Christians, you are wagering so much on Jesus. Right? Your weekend schedules are busy enough and yet you carve out time as a priority to be in a place like this to lift up his name. Some of you, before you'll eat a single bite of any meal on any day of the year, you will fold your hands and speak the name of Jesus. Some of you, when you make your budget, even though you're not a billionaire, you give to the poor because Jesus said. You give to spread his name because that's what Jesus wanted. Some of you actually determine what's right or wrong, not based on how you feel or what your friends think, but on what Jesus said in this book that he loved. You bet an insane amount on Jesus.

And Easter would say to you "Good choice." If Jesus was just a philosopher back in the day like any other philosopher, you might be taking a big risk. But if he really loved you enough to die for you, and if he really pulled off the greatest confirmation of his authority and identity by conquering the great, you are no fool for opening the book every day, for speaking his name before every meal, for prioritizing your schedule, your values, your budget, your life. If Jesus is a first importance in everything you do, if you love him more than your spouse, more than your kids, more than this nation, more than your own feelings or instincts, you're no fool. If there is a God who actually loved you enough to come down from Heaven so you could get to Heaven, who would shed his blood so God would not be mad but pleased with you, the most logical thing in the world would be to follow him with all of your heart, all of your soul, all of your mind, and all of your strength.

But what about if you're not there yet? Or what if you're in group number two, and you know it's Easter, so you're in church, but you're not always in church, you're a spiritual person, but not super religious. What does the Easter message say to a person like that? Honestly, I think Easter would say, "Nah. No, that doesn't make sense." Wait, you believe that God died a gritty death on a cross, he rose from the grave to conquer your fear of death and you're going to treat him like your dentist?

You're going to stop in twice a year on Christmas and Easter and call on his name if there's an emergency now. No, no, no, no.

Now, no offense but that doesn't make any sense. I was trying to figure out how I would explain to Peter and Paul and Mary Magdalene, the concept of worshipping Jesus with other Christians two times a year, and I think they would have gone, "Huh". Now, you can reject him if you want to, you don't have to believe in him, but if you believe in your heart that God died for you, that he conquered the grave for you, then being, kind of, spiritual, it just doesn't make sense. Jesus won't allow it.

And that's why Jesus wants you here today. I get how it happens, life gets busy, you get your job in high school, you're trying to pay off college debt, establish yourself in your career, the kids have tournaments, things get busy, you, kind of, drift from those habits. But today, Jesus wants to remind you that Easter is a big deal. Following Jesus is worthy of our time, our everything; because this is the Jesus who gave up everything so we could have everything spiritual in the presence of God.

Just about a year ago, a crazy thing happened. My car wouldn't start and I lost my voice on the same day. So, I was texting my family to try to give me a ride to church, and no one was answering. So, I ordered an Uber. And this big, pimped out Jeep rolls into my driveway, this woman's driving, I jump in the passenger's seat and she and I have the funniest conversation on the drive to church with me texting and her talking. And her phone is, kind of, perched up there like Uber drivers sometimes have, so she could read my texts. And we're joking and laughing and then Jesus came up. We were just a few blocks from church here. We drove past the gas station and she commented just how expensive gas was, and I thought about this gas guzzling, pimped out Jeep. So, I texted her, "Time to get that Prius." My text came up, she laughed and then I added, "It's what Jesus wants." And suddenly, she got, kind of, quiet. And literally, as we pull into the parking lot of this church and she drops me off at the front door, she says, "Well, wouldn't be the first time I disappointed Jesus."

I wonder if that's what's in the back of your mind when you hear that name. Some memory of what you did, how far you've been from this book, this place, this God. But if that's you, I need to remind you who starred with Jesus in the first Easter story. Do you remember the names? Mary, the first witness, do you know her story? Demonic, dark. Jesus spoke her name and revealed himself as God to her before anyone else. Peter, do you know that story? He was the dude who denied he even knew Jesus the Thursday before Easter Sunday and he appeared to him too. The disciples who fled and bailed on Jesus, they were -- They're cowards not courageous. And he appeared, and what did he say? "You guys." No, no, he said, "Peace be to you." And Thomas the doubter, who didn't have great faith, Jesus appeared to him personally. And Saul who was murdering Christians, Jesus appeared to him.

He appeared to the broken, the sinful, the lost because the message of his death and resurrection, the forgiveness of sins did not have exceptions or asterisks at the end of the good news. It was for them. It's for me and it's for you. So, however bad it's been, however messy your story is, please don't assume that your chance is lost and

you are too far gone. Not for Jesus. Good Friday and Easter are the proof. Which means we're ready for part two.

This is the crowd participation part of the sermon, are you ready for it? Alright, I need you to turn to someone next to you, look them in the eye really quick. Find a partner. Alright, now repeat after me, ready? In a nice, loud voice, say to them, "You, you are going..."

CONGREGATION: Are going...

PASTOR: To die."

CONGREGATION: To die.

Well, that's funny to y'all. Yeah, that's true. Grab a pen, write this down, I'm going to cover this part quickly. Jesus is a big deal because, sorry to bring it up, you are going to die. Now, lots of us laughed when we said that, but I thought about our church family, and just today, we had husbands and wives saying those words with major surgeries, chemo, and cancer. My neighbor was here at the last service, she has a brain tumor, the doctors said she probably won't make it to next Easter.

We try to re-brand, in America, death. You go to a funeral and what do we call it now? A celebration of life? I've been to a lot of celebrations. They don't feel quite like that. Sooner or later, you face it when you come face to face with it and you start to believe what the Bible says that death is not our friend, it's not part of the circle of life, it is an intrusion and an enemy that brings deep fear and sadness. And my question to you is how do you face that? When the diagnosis comes, when you get the phone call that there's been an accident, how do you deal with that? And until that, Capital D Death Day, how do you just deal with life with all of its losses? When pets die, and pregnancies don't come to fruition, when sometimes the relationships that had so much hope are torn apart, when your hopes and dreams to stay sober or stay connected to someone, it doesn't -- How do you deal with that?

Well, the Jesus who conquered the grave has the perfect answer. Let me share with you one last passage from the Gospel of John 11, Jesus spoke these words to his friend, Martha. "Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?'"

I think people get freaked out of death, maybe for a good reason. The process sometimes is very, very unpleasant. But have you ever just thought about how it will feel when your moment comes? I mean, when I'm gathered at a service like Easter worship and I see people from all different backgrounds, tribes, countries and languages; and just hundreds of us are lifting up the name of Jesus. When the harmonies of a few human vocalists just melt my heart, can you imagine when you hear the first cords of billions of people from every place on the planet surrounding



the angels and the throne of Jesus, can you imagine how that church service will feel?

I mean, I love a good cinnamon roll; but can you imagine the feast in Heaven, right? I mean, it's better than anything we've ever experienced, and no one has to do the dishes after it's done, right? Can you imagine the people? I love being with the people that I love, but all of us are flawed people. Around that Easter feast in Heaven, there's no drama or division, there's no worry or frustration, no one's tired or moody. Sin is gone, pain is gone, death is gone, no one excuses themselves to taking aspirin because their body -- It's all gone.

Instead, there is just Jesus, who is the life. I know we sorrowfully miss the ones that we love, but if you believe in Jesus, even though you die, you get to live, and I cannot wait for that day. Some people without faith, fear death. You don't need to. The one who believes in him will live, even though they die.

And if that weren't enough, then Jesus said, "And until that day comes, I'm not dead." One of his last quotes to his closest friends was, "Surely, I will be with you always." You might be wondering spiritually, unsure if you're good with God, unsure about faith in God, in general, afraid to die, struggling in life. Here's where you are. Easter points you back to the path, who is Jesus. The one who is the way that leads to the most beautiful sight you've ever seen. The face of a smiling and forgiving father in Heaven.

So, my dear friends in Jesus, Easter is a big deal because it is all about Jesus, the resurrection and the life. Do you believe this? If so, say "Amen."

CONGREGATION: Amen.

Amen. Let's pray.

Jesus, thank you. Not just for being a good teacher, but for being a perfect Savior. If you were like all those other religious founders, you would've just given us the list of things to make God happy that we would never keep. But that wasn't you. Instead, you kept the list in our place. You didn't threaten us with condemnation if we didn't do everything. Instead, you just offered us the free gift of eternal life in Heaven through your name. That's why we trust you, that's why we love you, it's why we follow you, even when it's difficult, because you are worthy. Jesus, you are worth it. I know on Easter Sunday, all kinds of people come, all kinds of people watch, all kinds of people listen. And all of us need a different nudge from you. So, God, whether it's reading a book, or coming back to church, or starting a conversation, or asking a question, please, just give us exactly what we need in this moment that we would be one step closer to you, the God of life, the God of peace, and the God of eternal joy.

We're so grateful for the hope that Easter gives, and we're so grateful for the joy that we find in your son, Jesus. It's in His name that we pray, and all of God's people say, "Amen."