

## Sermon 1 of 5 from the “Risen” Campaign Kit

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*Note: This sermon may be adapted to meet your congregation’s needs, your preaching style, and preferred time length*

RISEN!: Week 1

### **“The Jesus You Never Knew”** *Responding to God’s Passion for You*

#### **TEXT**

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” —John 3:16–17*

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to our brand-new message series “Risen!” I am praying that God will use this series to light some fires that will never go out in our hearts, in our homes, and in our church.

One of my favorites stories will explain why this series is so exciting. Scott and Leslie were married and left on their honeymoon. They arrived in the wee hours of the morning at a fancy hotel. Excited, they were looking forward to spending their first night together in a luxurious bed in the hotel’s bridal suite. When they got to their room, they found a sofa, a chair, and a table—but no bed. After several minutes, they discovered the sofa was a fold-out bed. They spent a fitful night tossing and turning on a lumpy mattress with sagging springs.

With their honeymoon night ruined, Scott stormed down to the front desk the next morning and gave the clerk a tongue-lashing. “There must be some mistake,” the clerk said after checking the

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reservation. "Did you open the door to the bedroom?"

Scott went back up to the room, opened a door that he thought led to a closet, and discovered the bedroom to the bridal suite. Inside was a king-sized bed with a fruit basket, a box of chocolates, and a dozen red roses.

Completely available . . . yet totally unused!

### **SOME DOORS ARE TOO IMPORTANT TO LEAVE CLOSED**

This series is an invitation to open the door to the implications of the resurrection and its power in your life.

The early Christians spent the first Easter Sunday morning behind a locked door. They huddled together, fearing for their lives. Jesus had just been killed, and they thought they were next. They walked into that room defeated, but when they walked out, they were dynamic. They walked into that room crushed; they walked out confident. They walked in having a pity party; they walked out ready to take on the world. They walked into that room paralyzed by fear; they walked out filled with faith.

*Something happened in that room.*

What happened? That's what this series is about. Join us for the next four weeks, and you can experience the same kind of transformation that the disciples underwent that first Easter.

And it all starts with the last week in Jesus's life . . .

America is once again fixated on the historic events occurring in the Middle East right now. But two thousand years ago, six events took place in twelve hours that changed the world permanently. Those six events have changed everything, and life has never been the same. History was split by what happened in this twelve-hour period. People still talk about it. Movies are still made about it. The six

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events were that Jesus was betrayed by Judas, forsaken by His friends, denied by His followers, tried by His accusers, tortured by Roman guards, and crucified by His enemies.

Why did God allow these six events? Why did Jesus go through all that suffering? Why was He subject to a grueling, gruesome, horrendous, brutal death?

A new movie has been made, allowing millions of people to see the Gospel. They will see *what* happened. Today, we’ll talk about *why* it happened.

We are going to take a look at the two most important questions in life.

1. What really happened at the cross?
2. If I really “get” what happened at the cross, how does that change how I live?

The most famous verse in the Bible is John 3:16. It’s in your Bible . . . and on a sign at almost every NFL game. Let’s read it and the verse following.

*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. (John 3:16–17)*

This is Christianity summarized. *Gospel* means “good news,” and this is the good news in a nutshell. You can even see Gospel spelled out in it: God’s . . . Only . . . Son . . . Perish . . . Eternal . . . Life.

Max Lucado wrote about the cross in his book *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior*:

The cross. It rests on the timeline of history like a compelling diamond. Its tragedy summons all sufferers. Its absurdity attracts all cynics. Its hope lures all searchers. . . .

History has idolized it and despised it, gold-plated it and burned it, worn and trashed it.

History has done everything to it but ignore it.

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That’s the one option that the cross does not offer.

No one can ignore it! You can’t ignore a piece of lumber that suspends the greatest claim in history. . . .

Its bottom line is sobering: if the account is true, it is history’s hinge. Period. If not, it is history’s hoax.

That’s why the cross is what matters.<sup>1</sup>

### UNDERSTANDING GOD’S PASSION FOR YOU

What really happens when people encounter the cross of Jesus Christ? To find out, let’s look at three people who were at the cross. We can read about them in this passage:

*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:25–27)*

### 1. THE CROSS IS A PLACE OF REDEMPTION

#### Video Clip Week 1A

The most unlikely people are found at the cross. One of the most surprising people who attended the crucifixion was Mary Magdalene. She found that the cross is the place of redemption.

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<sup>1</sup> Max Lucado, *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), xiii.

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*Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. (John 19:25).*

Mary Magdalene was one of the *least likely* characters in the New Testament to receive redemption. Raise your hand if you’re the least likely person to receive redemption. Or, better yet, raise your hand if you’re sitting next to the least likely person to receive redemption. Just kidding . . .

In Luke 8:2, we read that Mary Magdalene was a woman from whom Jesus had cast out seven demons. These seven demons made her do terrible things. She had been in bondage for a long time. Satan was at work in her life to destroy her emotionally and spiritually. She was a woman “from the streets.” In short, Mary was in a hopeless and helpless situation. But Jesus delivered her and set her free.

Think of how the apostle Paul described the work of Christ: *“to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, so that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me” (Acts 26:18).*

The cross is a *place of exchange*. Unfathomable exchanges take place when you go to the cross. You go from darkness to light. You discover the power of God as He begins to take control, so you move from weakness to power. You move from guilt to grace. You exchange past failures for future hope. This is what Jesus did for Mary Magdalene.

But redemption is costly. For me to receive forgiveness, Jesus had to be made sin for me and die in my place. I can imagine Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane praying for me. I imagine Him saying, “God, is there any other way this person could get into heaven except I go and die on the cross for all of his sins and pay for them?” And God says, “Son, You know there’s no other way. You know that no sin can enter into heaven. Somebody has to pay for that man’s sin.”

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Jesus went through all this trial, and all the suffering, and all the scourging, and then they nailed Him to a cross. By going to the cross, Jesus was saying, “Okay, Father, You said if I took all the judgment for this one man’s sin, that he could go to heaven. So all right, Father. Let the judgment fall.”

And in that moment of agony, Jesus from the cross cried out, “*It is finished!*” (*John 19:30*). Then the skies turned dark and for three and a half hours there was silence in heaven. At that time, Jesus was taking on the sin of the world.

That is love. And that is love in the first degree. When they drove those nails through the hands of Jesus, they went straight into the heart of God.

### 2. THE CROSS IS A PLACE OF RELATIONSHIP

*[Use this illustration, or replace it with one of your own]*

A few years ago I took a call from *Forbes* magazine. They asked if they could do an interview. Surprised I responded, “You are the magazine for millionaires. You must have the wrong Ray Johnston.” They replied that they wanted to do an interview on what CEOs of large corporations could learn from pastors of large churches. Game on!

We had a fascinating three-hour conversation . . . and their *last* question was the best question. They asked, “What is the most important thing that you have learned in the last ten years?” I replied, “That’s easy. Here it is: the ‘Solution to Everything’ is the *right person*.” I explained that in the Old Testament, the nation of Israel prospered with the right leader and declined under the wrong leader. I also said, “By the way, that is also the *central message of the Bible!* The solution to everything is *not* the right *religion* . . . or the right *rituals*. The solution to everything is a *relationship* with the *right person*, and Christians believe that person is Jesus Christ.”

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Where is that relationship found? What makes it possible? Mary, the mother of Jesus, was at the cross and discovered that relationship is at the cross.

The cross is the place of relationship.

Mary suffered because of *how* Jesus died. He was hung on a cross, a method of capital punishment, a death inflicted on common thieves.

Mary suffered because of *where* He died. He was out in the open, in a public place, stripped bare, shamefully exposed for all to see. As Mary stood there, she felt the pain of the sword go through her soul.

*When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to her, “Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” (John 19:26–27)*

What was Jesus saying to us? That we are now in relationship with Him. “*You are no longer strangers and aliens [outsiders without rights of citizenship], but you are . . . [members] of God’s household*” (Ephesians 2:19, AMP). That means, because of the cross, you belong in God’s household with every other Christian.

It takes every one of us to make God’s household complete, for we each have different work to do. So we belong to each other and need all others.

*For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans 12:4–5)*

Because of the cross, we are all part of Christ’s body now. The cross is a place of relationship.

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### 3. THE CROSS IS A PLACE OF RESPONSIBILITY

We see through John, the “beloved disciple,” that the cross is a place of responsibility. Jesus restored John—but, just as He wants for all of us, it didn’t stop there. At the cross, He also gave John some responsibility.

*“Woman, here is your son,” and to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (John 19:26–27)*

Jesus was saying that John was going to take Jesus’s place. He would no longer be on earth to watch over His mother, so John was going to assume that role. He was saying, *Go take My mother and be a son to her.*

For John, the cross was a place of responsibility. And John accepted it. *“From that time on, this disciple took her into his home” (John 19:27).*

The cross required responsibility of others as well.

*A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. (Mark 15:21)*

Taken together, you can see what the message is. *All* believers are taking Christ’s place here on earth. When He rose from the dead, Jesus said, *“As the Father has sent me, I am sending you” (John 20:21).*

You and I represent Jesus to others. To acknowledge the cross is to acknowledge a place of responsibility.

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**RESPONDING TO GOD’S PASSION FOR YOU**

What happens when we really “get” the message of the cross?

**1. TOWARD GOD: A NEW *CONFIDENCE***

When we really get the message of the cross, we become confident in God. We become confident in God’s love, in His grace, and in His power.

- **In His Love**

**Video Clip Week 1B**

We discover our value at the cross. When we really get the message of the cross, we become confident in God’s love.

*We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)*

*We are now members of God’s own family. . . . And God has reserved for his children the priceless gift of eternal life; it is kept in heaven for you . . . and God, in his mighty power, will make sure that you get there safely to receive it because you are trusting him. (1 Peter 1:3–5, TLB)*

*What a God we have! . . . Because Jesus was raised from the dead, we’ve been given a brand-new life and have everything to live for, including a future in heaven—and the future starts now! (1 Peter 1:3-4, MSG)*

- **In His Grace**

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Many thought the grace of Jesus was a lie. When we really get the message of the cross, we become confident in God’s grace.

*For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God’s throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. (Hebrews 4:15–16)*

That means we can live free from guilt. Guilt is a killer. Guilt puts us in a place of punishment, where we beat ourselves up. Guilt puts us in a state of paralysis, where we’re locked in a prison of the past. Guilt will rob you of joy. It will rob you of energy. It will rob you of confidence. Eventually, guilt will even rob you of your faith.

Did you ever have an Etch A Sketch toy? Have you ever thought, *Wouldn’t it be great if life would work the same way?* Wouldn’t it be fun to shake, and everything you don’t like just vanishes? But look at what Scripture says:

*God put the world square with himself through the Messiah, giving the world a fresh start by offering forgiveness of sins. God has given us the task of telling everyone what he is doing. . .*

*How? you ask. In Christ. God put the wrong on him who never did anything wrong, so we could be put right with God. (2 Corinthians 5:19, 21, MSG)*

God wants everyone to know about the cross—not to make them feel guilty, but to free them from guilt.

- **In His Power Working Through Me**

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When we really get the message of the cross, we become confident in God’s power. Notice what happened after the resurrection.

*After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God. (Acts 1:3)*

Notice it wasn’t just a one-time shot—“*Surprise! Here I am!*”—and then Jesus was never seen again. That could have been a vision. It could have been a dream. It could have been many people in their deep grief mustering up an illusion. Instead, we learn that there were “*many convincing proofs that he was alive.*” Scripture says that for forty days Jesus continued to appear to the apostles and tell them about the kingdom of God. Forty days!

For forty days, Jesus was walking the streets of Jerusalem. All kinds of people saw Him. About many became believers as a result. Architects and historians tell us that Jerusalem had a population of about a quarter of a million people. Within twenty years of the resurrection, in the city of Jerusalem, there were between 100,000 and 125,000 believers. That’s half the city becoming believers! Why? Because so many people had seen Him . . . and been convinced of the amazing miracle of His resurrection and salvation for all!

Can you imagine it? You’re walking down the street and your friend grabs your arm and says, “That’s the guy! The guy the Romans killed on the cross! The guy who said He was God! I guess He was . . .”

How would you have liked to be one of the religious leaders who put Jesus to death? “Hey, you know that guy you crucified? . . . *He’s back!*”

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That’s the power of the cross. That’s the kind of confidence we’re filled with because of the cross!

### 2. TOWARD SIN: A NEW FEAR

When we really get the message of the cross, we gain a new fear—but it’s a fear toward sin.

The world doesn’t fear sin; the world fears other things. Jesus didn’t fear what the world fears.

We ought to hate sin. Why? Because sin put Jesus on the cross. Sin is not a laughing matter.

How serious is sin? Just look at the cross. It is a serious matter, so we should hate sin and do everything we can to fight against injustice in the world. Jesus said,

*I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. (John 17:14–15)*

We should fight sin of every kind, large or small.

There was a story about a man who left his factory job every day with a pile of sand in his wheelbarrow. The guards would go through the pile each day, looking for stolen property, but they could never find anything. Every day, it was the same thing. Then one day, one of the guards asked another, “Where does he get these wheelbarrows?” Finally, they realized he was stealing wheelbarrows!

In government, there are places where leaders selectively obey laws. They do what is convenient for them. They just head out each day, assured they’re okay, because all anyone sees is a load of sand.

*“When a crime is not punished quickly, people feel it is safe to do wrong” (Ecclesiastes 8:11, NLT).* Sin is sin, wherever you find it, whatever it is.

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The individual greatest need of our time is the need for integrity! After all, *"Our old life died with Christ on the cross so that our sinful selves would have no power over us and we would not be slaves to sin"* (Romans 6:6, NCV).

The attitude of God found in Scripture is always that any sin is deadly serious. Look around you today. Sin has all but destroyed the world that could have been.

### 3. TOWARD PEOPLE: A NEW COMPASSION

When we really get the message of the cross, we gain a new compassion for people.

We are to love Christ and hate sin. And we are to love others enough to tell them about Him. The apostle Paul wrote, *"God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation"* (2 Corinthians 5:19).

If somebody died for you, wouldn't you want to know about it? If someone died for your next-door neighbor, your mom or dad, your best friends, the people you work with and go to school with, don't you think they deserve to know about it?

This is why we do what we do in Christian ministry. This is why we have churches, and why we educate children, and why we minister to the community. It's so we can reach one more for Jesus.

The average person living in this area is sitting home right now, perhaps reading the newspaper online or watching television, and is totally oblivious to what Jesus Christ has done and how much God loves them.

If your friend lives his or her entire life without knowing Jesus Christ and dies without Jesus, then for that person, the death of Jesus Christ was wasted. Wasted! Worthless!

*[Close in prayer]*

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Reminder: You're never going to have a better chance for the rest of your life than right now to tell someone about Christ, because of a movie that has portrayed His story. Don't waste the opportunity.

Take them to the movie. Buy them dinner.

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