I BELIEVE IN CHRISTIANITY AS I BELIEVE THAT THE SUN HAS RISEN, NOT ONLY BECAUSE I SEE IT BUT BECAUSE BY IT I SEE EVERYTHING ELSE. - C.S. LEWIS

CRAIG: We are so glad that you’re here this morning. We’ve been praying and planning for the service for so long. Can I make an assumption? You guys know about the cross, right? Like, nobody’s here going, “Cross? What are you talking about?” Yeah, I mean I think we probably all know that part of the story, right? Jesus was arrested, subjected to a mockery of a trial, the Roman authorities declared Him innocent, but they caved to pressure from the Jewish religious elite, so He’s beaten, nailed to a cross, and died. We know that part. But we also know that’s not the whole story, right? It’s not the end of the story. We wouldn’t be here if that were the end of the story.

If that were the end of the story, we’d have a tragedy, and we’re not here because of a tragedy. We’re here because of a triumph. Think we all know what happened. My question to you this morning is, do you know why it happened? Because the why is so much more important than the what. We’re here today 2,000 years later not because of what happened but really because of why it happened. I mean, do you understand that the cross wasn’t an accident? It wasn’t a surprise to Jesus. He knew it was coming all along. In fact, a long time before He got to Jerusalem, He said to His followers, “The Son of Man,” that was His favorite title for Himself, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priest, and the teachers of the law, and He must be killed, and on the third day be raised to life.”

So the cross wasn’t a surprise to Jesus. He pursued it, and He pursued it because of why He knew it was necessary. And it’s really only when we understand the why He went to the cross that we can really fully appreciate and fully embrace the celebration that Easter represents.

You know, the Christian church is often been accused of being obsessed with sin, talking a lot about sin, and there’s some merit to that accusation. Does anybody remember The Church Lady from “Saturday Night Live”? Yeah? I knew that woman. She taught my Sunday school when I was little. I grew up in a church where I heard a lot of, “Well this is sin,” and “that is sin,” and “these people are sinners,” and “those people are sinners,” and the interesting thing is I heard so much about what is sin that it took a long time before I really began to get a handle on what sin is, what is actually meant by it.

Some of you may know that the part of the Bible we call The Old Testament was written in the language of Hebrew, and the part we called The New Testament was written in language of Greek, and the Hebrew and Greek languages have a lot of different words for sin that we find in scripture. One of the most common Hebrew words for sin is “cha’ta”. It’s kinda fun to say, get the tongue on the roof of your mouth and try it, “cha’ta.” If you do it right, the people in front of you should be going like that right now, okay?

The Greek equivalent for that same thing is “hamart’a,” and both of these mean the same thing, and both of these are archery terms. They literally mean “to miss the mark”. So, you know, in archery, you got a bullseye, right? And the idea is to hit that dead center, and when you don’t hit it dead center, when you’re kinda all over the place or when you, you know, go totally off the target and kill the guy who’s waiting back there to collect all the arrows, they would say, “Cha’ta, you missed the mark,” or “Hamart’a, you missed the mark.”

And the Bible uses that same language for sin, but of course the target’s not an arbitrary bullseye. The target is actually God’s
own nature and character, because you and I were actually made to be like God. Our lives are supposed to reflect His own nature and character, and every time that our lives don’t, we miss the mark. When God says, “He’s good,” every time we act in a way that’s not good, we missed the mark. God is selfless, and when we’re selfish, we fall short, we miss the mark. God is truth, and so whenever we tell that lie, even that little white lie, we’ve fallen short, we’ve missed the mark. And here’s the reality, is that missing the mark leaves a mark. And you and I have all experienced the pain when other people treat us in ways that don’t even come close to the way that God is, when we’re treated with cruelty, when we’re treated with anger, when we’re treated with selfishness. We know what kind of marks those leave on us. But if we’re gonna be totally honest, we also have to recognize that we’ve done the same thing to other people. That in the ways that we have missed the mark of who God is, we’ve caused harm to other people, we’ve left marks on them as well.

Another really common Hebrew word for sin is “pesha”. The Greek equivalent is “parabasis”. And a lot of times, these are translated as sin in scripture, but they both literally mean to transgress, and that may not be a really familiar word, but I guarantee you it’s a familiar activity. How many of you grew up with brothers and sisters? How many of you went on long car trips with brothers and sisters? That went really well, right, that was good family time? How many of you had this experience, you know, at some point on the trip, mom or dad get so fed up with the poking, and the pinching, and the prodding from the backseat that they whirl around and they go, “Okay, here’s what we’re doing, we’re drawing a line. That’s your side, that’s her side. You do not go on his side, you do not go on her side. No one will cross this line,” which is great parenting. It works really well, right? For like a half mile, until somebody kinda begins to go... “I don’t know what she’s talking about,” right? That’s transgression. It’s crossing the line.

Now, the line isn’t the arbitrary thing that mom or dad says because they’re fed up with us or irritated, the line is the lines that God gives us in order for us to live our lives inside those lines. And God does that not because He’s irritated, but He does it for our good. He’s given us so many good gifts, but every good gift can become something dangerous if it’s used outside of its intended purposes, and so these lines are intended to give us the lines that we live our lives in. And so He’s given us great gifts, like our sexuality, and material possessions, and all these great things, but He said, “Here’s where they’re supposed to be enjoyed, here’s where they’re supposed to be kept,” and as long as you enjoy all the good gifts God has given inside those lines, you experience not only the best from those gifts but you experience peace, and joy, and fulfillment, but the problem is we don’t trust that God is good.

We don’t trust that God is good, and so we cross the lines. We use all these different kinds of gifts outside the lines, we go back and forth, and the reality is that crossing lines leave scars. I mean, you think about the one place in life where we are most aware of the lines is like on a two-way street. There’s lines down the middle, and they’re there for your good. If we start living outside those lines, we start driving outside those lines, what happens? You end up in head-on collisions. Crossing the lines leaves scars, it does damage, and we’ve experienced that. There’s probably not a single person in this room that has not experienced the damage that comes because somebody chose to live their life outside the lines. They wanted more than was due them. They used some gift, or some ability, or in some way that they ran roughshod over you, and you still bear the scars from being treated in that way. But again, if we’re gonna be completely honest, it’s not just stuff that’s been done to us, it’s stuff that we’ve done to others. We have crossed the lines, and we have left scars on other people.

Another common Hebrew word for sin is “ta’ah”. The Greek equivalent is “planao”. I particularly like the Greek version because it’s actually the word that we get our word “planet” from, and both “ta’ah” and “planao” literally mean “to wander”. The Greeks hated the planets. They didn’t consider ‘em good things, they called them evil stars, wandering stars, and the reason that they were considered evil was because if you’re out on a boat and you’re sailing through the night, one of the things you would do to make sure you stayed on a straight course is you’d fix the bow of your boat to one of the stars and you just keep heading towards it, which is great if it was an actual star because they didn’t move. But the planets move day to day, and so if you fix the bow of your boat to a wandering star, a planet, you gradually got off course and you ended up in really dangerous territory without ever knowing it. It’s one of the words for sin, it’s to wander. It’s to wander off the path.
See, God has given us a path in life, and He said, “Walk this path, and what you get to, is you’ll get to good things, you’ll get to
great things because I love you and I have the absolute best in store for you,” but we go, “Nah, I don’t know that I really trust
You. I’ll set my own course. I’m gonna go over here, and I’m gonna go over here, and I’m gonna wander around,” and we wander
off the path in a thousand different ways constantly. And you might go, “Okay, what’s the big deal about wandering,” but again
if you go back to traffic, what’s the big deal if somebody wanders off the road and onto the sidewalk? It’s kind of a big deal.
Wandering causes wounds when we set our own path, because we don’t know the future, we don’t know what’s coming. We can’t
possibly anticipate the consequences of the path that we’re gonna end up on when we decide to set it for ourselves. Wandering
causes wounds.

And there’s other words for sin, but you get the point, right? Sin makes a mess of things. It makes a mess of us, it messes us
up inside. We begin to want things that aren’t good for us. We begin to not want things that are good for us. We’re confused
and conflicted inside. It messes up our relationships with other people. We hurt them, they hurt us, they hurt us back so we hurt
them even more, and it spirals down until we’re just flailing at each other, causing scar after scar and wound after wound. And
of course it messes up our relationship with God. Not because God doesn’t love us, please hear me. It’s not that our sin causes
God to not love us, but it does cause us to not love Him. It causes us to not really want God because the reality is that His purity
becomes painful for us, because if we were to be in His presence in this way, what we would see in Him would cause us to reflect
upon ourselves in such a way that we’re just ashamed and horrified. I mean, imagine if your hand is cut and scraped, can you
imagine putting that into a bowl full of bleach? We don’t want that. His purity becomes painful, and so we don’t want God, and
so the mess that we’ve made of ourselves messes our relationship with God, and at some point we just have to wake up and
acknowledge it. We have to acknowledge what we are, we’re sinners. It’s not that we’ve done sin, I mean that’s true, but it’s not
just that we’ve done sin, it’s that we are sinners. And our sin has a tremendous consequence.

The Bible puts it this way. It says, “For the wages of sin is death.” And that word “wage” is important. It doesn’t say the punish-
ment for sin. It says “the wages”. Wages are what you fairly earn for your work. This isn’t God going, “You’ve sinned, I’m gonna
wipe you out.” No, this is the natural payment that comes from what we are. I mean, think about it this way. If you wander away
from the light, where do you end up? The dark. It’s not the light’s fault, it’s not a punishment from the light, it’s what happens
when you...it’s the wages of walking away from the light. If you wander away from the warmth of a fire when you’re at camping,
you end up in the cold. It’s not the fire’s fault, it’s the wages of walking away from the fire. Well God is the source and the author
of life, and peace, and hope, and joy, and when we walk away from God, when we wander away from God, when we miss the
mark and cross the lines and wander off the path from God, because He’s life, we end up in death, it’s the wages.

And when the Bible talks about death as it relates to God, it’s not just talking about a heart that stops beating or a brain that no
longer has any electrical activity, it’s talking about a separation, a separation from the only source of hope, and joy, and peace,
but it’s a separation that will go on for eternity because of our sin. And that’s the bad news, right? But it’s actually worst than
that. You ready for worse news? Like you’re gonna say, “Yeah, give me the worst news,” right? There’s nothing we can do about
it, that’s the worst news. There is nothing we can do about it. I mean, we can try, but it didn’t go anywhere. It’s an indelible mark
upon us. And we can say, “Okay, well from here on out, I just...I won’t do it anymore. I just...I’ll never miss the mark ever again,”
but the problem is our arrows are twisted, and so in all of our attempts to hit the mark, we just keep missing. Or we could say,
“Well I’m just never gonna cross that line again, except, you know, this is one time right now. And well maybe I kinda need to,”
and we go, “Okay, well, but I’ll always walk the path, I’m never gonna get off the path ever gain,” but the reality is that we keep
getting off the path. And we just make it worse.

And you know what? Here’s the reality. Even if we could stop sinning, even if we could make it so that we never made another
bad call, we never made another mark, never made another scar, it still wouldn’t take care of the mess we’ve already got. There’s
nothing we can do about it. But there is something God can do about it. And you know that part of the story, too. Jesus came and
He lived the perfect life. No mark missing or line crossing or off-the-path wandering. He was a man, but He wasn’t just a man.
The book of Colossians puts it this way, “For God was pleased to have all of His fullness dwell in Him, and through Him to recon-
cile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in Heaven, by making peace through His blood that was shed on the
cross." Says, “Once you were alienated from God and you were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.” And I know
that sound harsh, but here’s the reality, evil is just the absence of good. It’s not the opposite of good, it’s the absence of good.
And every time that we miss the mark of God’s goodness, or cross the line, or wander off the path, we’re not good in the way that
God is, and that is by definition of evil. And I’ve done evil and you’ve done evil. We can play around with the words, but at the
bottom of it, that’s what it is. Our evil behavior causes us to be enemies of God. “But now He has reconciled. He has brought you
together by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight. To present you holy in His sight without blemish
and free from accusation.”

How’s that work? How’s the shed blood of Jesus Christ present us before the Father without blemish when this is the reality of
what we are? How can we possibly ever be free from blemish before our Father?

Because the shed blood of Jesus Christ covers it over. And it’s not a passive thing. Jesus doesn’t just go, “I died and so now
you’re kinda on your own, you’re covered.” No, no, no, Jesus comes, and He works it in. You go, “I’ve got this hidden thing. It’s too
deep down.” He goes, “No, no, no, it’s covered.” “Well I got this really big thing, it’s too big for...” “No, no, no, no, no, it’s cov-
ered.” “Hey but I’m still struggling over here.” “Yeah, I know, but it’s covered.” This is the gift of Easter. This is the gift of Easter,
and it’s a gift. That verse that I talked about earlier, “For the wages of sin is death,” well it goes on. It says, “But the gift of God
is eternal life.”

We earn death, but what we could not accomplish on our own, Jesus gives us as a gift. Like any gift, we have to accept it.
It’s available and it’s offered, but it has to be accepted. And if you’re here this morning and you’ve never accepted the gift of
forgiveness, I wanna give you a chance to do that today. I’ll give you a chance in just a moment, but I’ll give you a sneak preview
because it’s not complicated. It doesn’t require that you do anything weird. We talk about it this way at Mission Hills a lot. We
say it’s basically just this. We say, “I’ve sinned, we admit it, I’ve sinned.” We say, “I’m sorry.” So Jesus, thank You for dying for
me. Thank You for rising from the dead. I accept Your gift. And when we put those things together, we take hold of Jesus, and
we take hold of the gift that He offers us. And if you’ve never accepted the gift, I wanna give you the chance to do that in just a
moment. And before I do that, I’ve sinned, I’m sorry. Thank You for dying for me. Thank You for rising. We need to talk about that
one for a second. Because this is a great idea. This is the great concept, the idea that we could be forgiven, but we might go,
“You know what, it sounds great but it’s just a little too easy. I mean, can forgiveness really be that cheap?” No. There’s nothing
cheap about forgiveness. Our forgiveness cost Jesus everything. But like any good gift, the cost was paid by the giver. We just
have to accept it.

See here’s the thing. As great as this idea sounds like, if all we had was Friday, all we could be is hopeful. Jesus said He was
going to the cross to die for our sins, but if all we had was Friday, all we would have is the opportunity to be hopeful to think and
to hope maybe He pulled it off, maybe He did what He said He was gonna do, maybe. If all we had was Friday, all we could be is
hopeful. But we don’t just have Friday, do we? Friday makes us hopeful, Sunday makes us certain. The crucifixion of Jesus gives
us hope. The resurrection of Jesus gives us certainty, the proof that He did exactly what He said He would do.

“On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices that they had prepared and they went to the
tomb. And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.
And while they were wondering about this, suddenly, two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. In their
fright, the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, ‘Why are you looking for the living
among the dead? He’s not here, He is risen.’” I heard a few of you wanna do it. It’s okay, I’ll back up. “He’s not here, He is risen.”

Together: He is risen indeed.

Craig: “Remember how He told you I was still with you in Galilee? That the Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of
sinners, be crucified, and on the third day be raised again?” And they remembered His words, ‘Yeah, he did say that.’ When they
came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven, the 11 of His closest disciples,” Shoulda been 12, but 1 had betrayed Him, “and to all the others. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. But they did not believe the women, because their words seem to them like nonsense.” And I love that because it tells you these people weren’t predisposed to believe the resurrection. They weren’t expecting this. They thought this was ridiculous. When the women came and they said, “He is risen,”...

Together: He has risen indeed.

Craig: Yeah that’s not what they said. What they said was, “What are you smoking? He’s dead. They don’t get back up.” It seemed like nonsense. “Peter, however, got up, and he ran to the tomb. And bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.” He didn’t have to wonder very long. “Jesus himself came and stood among them, and He said to them, ‘Peace be with you.’ And they were startled and frightened, thinking that they saw a ghost. He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at My hands and My feet. It’s I Myself. Touch Me and see. A ghost is not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’ And when He had said this, He showed them His hands and His feet.” I think it’s interesting that twice Luke points out that He showed them His hands and His feet. We know from some of the other gospels that the wounds were still visible, the holes from the nails were still there, and they’re still there today. One day, all of us are gonna stand in front of Jesus, and if you cast a glimpse, a glance away from His face to His hands, you’re still gonna see the holes. And the reason for that is that it’s intended to be a permanent reminder that the blood is still flowing, that the fountain of forgiveness has not run dry, that it’s never too late. Today, it is not too late.

You can be forgiven. You can be covered in the blood of Jesus so that none of your sin ever shines through to the Father’s eyes ever again. And if you’ve never accepted that gift, I want to give you the chance, why not now? If you’ve never accepted the gift of forgiveness, now is the time to do it. I wanna ask everybody just close their eyes, bow their head, and if you’ve never accepted this gift, all you have to do right now and mean it, is to say to God, “I have sinned, and I am sorry. Thank You for dying for me, Jesus. Jesus, thank You for rising from the dead. I accept Your gift, Amen.” And if you’ve done that today, then you’ve taken hold of Jesus and the gift of forgiveness. If you did that last month, or 6 months ago, or 6 years ago, or 65 years ago, you took hold of the gift of forgiveness, and you are without blemish, you’re without stain, and you are in the presence of a God who’s delighted that you’re here, who’s delighted to have a relationship with you, because there’s nothing in the way, He’s paid it all. Would you stand up with us? The resurrection of Jesus is not just what gives us certainty, it’s what allows us to celebrate. And you cannot understand the significance of the crucifixion and the resurrection and not feel the need to celebrate it. He is risen.