

**“Overcome Death” (Easter 2017)**  
**Matthew 16:1-4**

*Introduction: Pg. 821*

Very excited you have chosen to come and worship with us on this Easter Sunday. My name is Tanner Turley. I serve as the Lead Pastor of Redemption Hill. God has done an amazing work in our church over these past six years, and there are many reasons we can say that but the biggest reason is because of what he is doing in people like you. We believe God changes people, and then he uses those people to change the world, so we hope this is the continuation or perhaps the start of a journey with us.

I don't know about you but one of my favorite aspects of Easter weekend is how it can serve as a memory maker. I can think back to times as a kid, seeing what was in the Easter basket on Sunday morning, going to church with my family (we pray this is a memory maker for you), then going to my grandparents house, hunting Easter eggs with all my cousins (in the back yard, not with four hundred other kids - hey, how about that Medford Eggstravaganza yesterday - let's give it up for Kara and her leadership team that did an amazing job!), Do you have memories like this? Great food with family. The always fun family pictures where you have kids and grown-up that don't want their picture taken. "Oh, my hair is such a mess."

*FCF:* Easter weekend is a joyous time, and it is so spectacular because God did something at Easter that is so much greater than we can begin to imagine. Something revolutionary, something world-altering happened the day Jesus Christ rose from the dead. So as we wrap up our Overcome series this morning, we are going to look at how we can...

**The Point: Overcome death through the death and resurrection of Jesus.**

*Read 16:1-4*

I am going to give you two question that I hope you will reflect on during our time together and make memories together.

**I. How do you approach Jesus?**

- Jesus had barely stepped foot back onto Jewish soil when a group of religious and political leaders, known as the Pharisees and Sadducees, confront and oppose him.
- This would have been like Yankees & Orioles fans conspiring against the Sox. It's not that they liked each other. They just dislike Jesus more than they dislike one another. (they hate us cause they ain't us).
- Jesus was a threat to their influence and popularity, so they went to him to test him. They want to see him fall.
- What are they asking for? A sign from heaven. Small request...
  - The Messiah would perform signs, And Jesus was performing many signs... (We saw this last week).
  - Perhaps some miracle from the sky, but at minimum they want him to do something that will "show beyond all contradiction that God is with him." (Morris) They wanted something spectacular and "on-demand."
  - "But it is not so much a request as it is an excuse. People want signs that God exists and that Jesus is Lord, but they always want *their* signs rather than the ones God provides." (O'Donnell, 337).

- App: Have you ever demanded a sign from God?
  - Probably the closest most of us have gotten to this is making deals with God, which is essentially a demand like this.
  - “God, if you’ll heal my loved one, I’ll be devoted to you the rest of my life.”
  - “God, if the Patriots complete this Super Bowl comeback, I’ll go to church by Easter Sunday.” Anyone? :)

They asked with wrong motives

How were they asking? With skeptical minds that wanted to undermine and discredit him. They were insincere and not “playing nice.” But Jesus takes it a step further in *verse 4*

- They were a generation characterized as evil and adulterous.
  - Essence of Sin: My way. I’m in charge. I’ll do your job, God.
  - We see evil in its varied forms. From the gas bombs of Assad in Syria on his own people, to the self-righteousness of the Pharisees or the self-indulgence of the Sadducees.
  - God says that evil is adulterous. Amazingly, God pictures his relationship with his people as that of a marriage. He desires that kind of unity and oneness, but like an unfaithful spouse, these people, like us, turned their back on God through sin and idolatry.
- Our sin then deceives us and hinders us from seeing Jesus.
- Don’t miss what Jesus is telling us: They don’t believe because they don’t want to believe.

*Jesus calls their bluff and indicts their insincerity.*

Rather than meeting their demands, he turns the table on them and exposes their insincere motives.

*Read 16:2-3*

- He does so by bridging the natural to the supernatural.
  - Sailors have always interpreted the skies to determine the safety of the seas and often used like maxims/proverbs to describe the conditions:
  - “Red skies at night, sailor’s delight; red skies in the morning, sailor’s warning.” I’m no Gloucesterman, but that makes sense to me.
- And then we have his drop the mic statement at the end of verse 3:
  - You can interpret signs in the sky, but not the signs of the times. You are unable to discern what God is doing right in front of you!
  - They’re missing the dawning of the kingdom that is being revealed through the teaching and works of Jesus.
    - His teaching... “Never spake a man like this before...” “with authority, not as the scribes and Pharisees.”
    - His work... Signs Jesus had been performing sign after sign. And the signs pointed beyond themselves. The kingdom is here.
- The indictment on the Pharisees and Sadducees was they missed what God was doing right in front of their face.

T: The first question is: How do you approach God? The second question this:

## **II. Have you embraced the climactic work of Jesus?**

*Read 16:4*

- “Jesus refuses to play their game.” (Blomberg)
- He says: “No more signs for now, but you will be given a sign. There is another sign on the horizon, and it will be a definitive sign, it will be a spectacular sign, it will be the sign of signs; it is the sign of Jonah.”
- To understand the sign of Jonah, we need to be familiar with the story of Jonah.

*The Story of Jonah:*

- Jonah was a prophet, one of God’s key representatives to deliver his message to people.
- Surprisingly, God told Jonah to go to the wicked people of Ninevah to urge them to flee from their evil ways.
- But there was a HUGE problem. Jonah hated Ninevah, and hated them so much that he sailed in the complete opposite direction. (Parents, don’t you love it when you kid does the exact opposite of what you tell them. Don’t eat that skittle. [Hand to mouth] Help your sisters clean up. [Have a seat] This was happening on a cosmic scale.)
- Through a series of events, Jonah was thrown overboard into the sea (That’s what we call discipline, but like a loving parent, God does it with a good and pure intent. That why he), but God sent a “great fish,” to swallow him whole, and Jonah stayed in the belly of that fish for three days and three nights until it spat him onto dry land.
- Jonah, then made his way to Ninevah where he told people God’s message and they believed and turned to God.
- Amazing story! That Jesus clearly affirmed it as historical. After all, if God created the world from nothing, surely this would not be a stretch.
- That’s the story, but why does Jesus say that story will serve as the climactic sign.

*The Sign of Jonah*

To get the full effect, we need to review some material, Matthew would expect us to be familiar with.

*Matthew 12:38-39.*

Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.

Sound familiar? but Jesus continues...

**For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (Matthew 12:40)**

Did you see what Jesus hoped they would see? Jonah in the whale three days and nights, signifying Jesus’ death in the tomb three days, but like Jonah, he would not stay there, (because death could not hold him; NT Smack talk) signifying his resurrection from the dead.

For you astute listeners who know Jesus only spent about 36 hours in the tomb, don’t be concerned with the phrase three days and three nights. In Jewish thought, any part of the day constituted the whole. Bang.

- **The Sign of Jonah: The Near Defeat of Jesus in Death.**
  - The death of Christ is climactic because he accomplished our salvation through his perfect life and substitutionary death.
  - Let me explain by sharing a couple of verses from the New Testament with you:

- **“For our sake he [God the Father] made him {Jesus, God the Son} to be sin** [he took on the penalty of all our wrongs: past, present and future - that’s amazing and what is more amazing is he] **who knew no sin** [he lived perfectly, which was essential to be a blameless sacrifice], **so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.** [Now because of his sacrifice on the Cross, we can be right in the sight of God. Not through doing enough good things on our own merit, but simply because of what Jesus did.]” **(2 Corinthians 5:21)** Jesus took our place as our substitute. A great exchange happened at the cross. And why did he do it?
  - **“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16)**
  - That’s the first part of the sign, but...
- **The Sign of Jonah: The Victorious Rising of Jesus from Death.**
    - Let me be clear: Christianity rises and falls on the resurrection. If Jesus was not raised from the dead, our faith is a joke.
    - As Jaraslov Pelikan famously stated: “If Christ is risen, then nothing else matters. And if Christ is not risen, then nothing else matters.” (You catch that?)
    - But Jesus did rise from the dead, and there is plenty of evidence to back that up. Time does not permit a detailed case for the resurrection, but here are a few thoughts:
      - First, you have the empty tomb. If Jesus’ bones were still in the grave, his opponents would have been highly motivated and happily produced them to end the whole movement.
      - Secondly, the major theories against Jesus rising from the dead are very weak.
        - For example, the swoon theory says Jesus didn’t really die but appeared dead. The problem with that is that Roman soldiers were professional killers.
      - Then you have evidence from the Bible itself.
        - The Old Testament predicted the Messiah would suffer and rise from the dead (go read Isaiah 53)
        - Women were the first witnesses. (Makes no sense in 1<sup>st</sup> century when a woman’s testimony would not carry weight in a court of law)
        - Paul says, Jesus appeared to more than 500 people, most of whom are still alive (in other words, just go ask, which debunks the hallucination theory really quick).
        - And how do you explain the transformation of Jesus’ closest followers from a fearful group tucked away hiding to a group of whom most would die a martyr’s death.
    - But here’s the crazy part: you can embrace the plausibility of the resurrection *and* not accept the work of Christ in a personal, life changing way. What would it take for you to believe that Jesus’ death and resurrection meet your greatest personal needs?

Let me give you three reasons why I’m eternally grateful for that first Easter.

**When Jesus overcame death, he guaranteed...** (not only that everything he said and did was true - which could be the end of the discussion, but also that)...

1. **All brokenness will be healed.** God’s restoration project to the way things ought to be was set in motion. What we long for will be true forever. No more tears, sorrow, sickness - cancer, abuse. No sighs of frustration - just wonder and joy and celebration. Even if you do not believe in the realities of resurrection, wouldn’t you want it to be true?
2. **Our good works have eternal significance.** 1) Not one ounce of our work, when we do it for God, is wasted (1 Cor 15:58); 2) Plus, every good work serves as a preview for what life will be

like forever in the coming kingdom of God. Clean water > no one will thirst. Or When we reconcile with a friend > no relational strife in God's kingdom. (Joy & Celebration; and Fulfillment). 3) Not to mention, we have a new power for accomplishing it (Eph.1) Silvanus??

3. **Death lost and life won.** Whoever believes in Jesus and trusts in the work he did on our behalf can have hope beyond this life. Because he lives, we will also will live. When we see someone at the end of their life, perhaps suffering from sickness, we might hear someone say: "They are just a shadow of their former self." But (as N.T. Wright points out) with the resurrection it is the exact opposite: "We are now just a shadow of our future selves. There is a real, glorious, astonishing you that we will be your resurrection body."

Are you experiencing the life altering realities of his death and resurrection? Have you embraced the climactic work of Christ?

*Conclusion:*

I can tell you this: Jesus wants you to trust him today. He wants you to **Overcome death through his death and resurrection.**

What's your next step in your spiritual journey? We deeply believe that steps change stories. I want to ask everyone to pull out the Connect Card you received when you came in this morning...

**Connect Card Pic** - Walk through it...

Explore.

Commit. Faith - turning over control to God. I'm done with my way, I want to follow your way.

Prayer. (Live with a new power, greater hope in the midst of brokenness, anything you want to share).