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The Champion
1 Corinthians 15:1-9
March 27, 2016, Easter Sunday
Pastor Jeff Germo

How many Canucks fans do we have here this morning? What happens when your team scores? The crowd goes nuts doesn't it? People get on their feet and pump their fists in the air and yell and scream for their team. They wave their white towels. Now, unfortunately, if you are a Canucks fan, you haven't had much opportunity lately to wave your white towel, except, perhaps in surrender. But, we won't dwell on that. What do you do when your team loses? Things get a little quieter, don't they? But, when you are winning, or when there is still a chance to win, things are pretty noisy.

Now, granted, we, as Canadians don't have much to celebrate in the hockey world right now. All the Canadian teams are near the bottom of the league, which is really humbling for us because we see hockey as our sport. So, the perfect thing to do when you are feeling disheartened by our poor performance is to go back to the 2010 Olympics. Remember?

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How many of you watched the Canada/U.S. gold medal Olympic hockey game on TV in 2010? We watched it on the big screen at the church in Richmond. It was so exciting. And then after the game we went to downtown Vancouver. It was crazy down there. I've never experienced anything like it. The streets were wall-to-wall people. They were celebrating, actually, we were all celebrating together, with people we didn't know. Complete strangers would come up to you and give you a high five. They were celebrating and not afraid to look silly. I have never experienced such a sense of oneness with such a large group before. It was very surreal. And that was for hockey.

I want you to look over at the cross.

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What do you notice? It's empty. The cross is empty. The grave is empty. Why is that? We have an empty cross because Jesus rose from the dead. That's what Easter is about. He is risen!!! And through the resurrection Jesus accomplished a lot of things.

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Here's what the Bible says in **Hebrews 2:14-15 (NLT)**.

14 Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. 15 Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying.

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Jesus defeated Satan, the enemy of our souls, on the cross.

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2 Timothy 1:10 (NLT)

10 And now he has made all of this plain to us by the appearing of Christ Jesus, our Savior. He broke the power of death and illuminated the way to life and immortality through the Good News.

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Jesus defeated death.

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Romans 6:9-11 (NLT)

⁹ We are sure of this because Christ was raised from the dead, and he will never die again. Death no longer has any power over him. ¹⁰ When he died, he died once to break the power of sin. But now that he lives, he lives for the glory of God. ¹¹ So you also should consider yourselves to be dead to the power of sin and alive to God through Christ Jesus.

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Jesus defeated sin.

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Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)

¹ Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

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Jesus is seated on the highest podium. He is the Champion of the world. We cheer loudly for the Canucks and are not afraid to look stupid. Actually, I don't do that unless the Flames are knocked out. Then I feel free to cheer for the Canucks. We cheered like crazy for our Canada Olympic hockey team six years ago. Does anybody feel like cheering for Jesus? He's the Champion of the world! He defeated Satan, sin, and death.

Now, there are, of course, those who say the resurrection didn't happen. Or it can't be proven so we are foolish for believing it. So, let's take a look for a few minutes at that. Is the resurrection something we can bank on?

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Can we stake our lives on it? Because that is really what we are saying. If you are here this morning, you either believe that the resurrection did happen, or you are investigating it, or you were dragged here against your will by your parents or your spouse. Or, it's just a tradition for you to come to church on Easter.

Whatever reason you are here this morning, this is something we need to know, because if Jesus did not rise, we are living a lie. And I don't know about you, but for me, **life is too short to live for something that is not real.**

Lee Strobel was an atheist. He was a journalist and legal affairs editor for the *Chicago Tribune*. His life was turned upside down when his wife became a Christian. He thought there was nothing worse that could happen to him. But, he was pleasantly surprised with the wonderful change in his wife's character over time. The change was so dramatic that it forced him to investigate the claims of the Bible about Christ. He used his journalism skills and his legal education from Yale Law School and crisscrossed the United States interviewing all the experts and he did his best to prove them wrong.

He wrote in his book, *The Case for Christ*,

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In this quest for truth, I've used my experience as a legal affairs journalist to look at numerous categories of proof – eyewitness evidence, documentary evidence, corroborating evidence, rebuttal evidence, scientific evidence, psychological evidence, circumstantial evidence, and, yes, even fingerprint evidence.¹

The end result was that, after examining all the evidence, this die hard atheist became a believer and follower of Jesus Christ.

He wrote about an interesting event in his book.

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“In 1963 the body of fourteen-year-old Addie Mae Collins, one of four African-American girls tragically murdered in an infamous church bombing by white racists, was buried in Birmingham, Alabama. For years family members kept returning to the grave to pray and leave flowers. In 1998 they made the decision to disinter the deceased for reburial at another cemetery.

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When workers were sent to dig up the body, however, they returned with a shocking discovery: The grave was empty. Understandably, family members were terribly distraught. Hampered by poorly kept records, cemetery officials scrambled to figure out what had happened. Several possibilities were raised, the primary one being that her tombstone had been erected in the wrong place.

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' Yet in the midst of determining what happened, one explanation was never proposed: Nobody suggested that young Addie Mae had been resurrected to walk the earth again. Why? Because by itself an empty grave does not a resurrection make.'²

Now, the difference between the case of Addie Mae Collins and the case of Christ is quite obvious. Nobody saw Addie walking around after she died. It didn't even cross their minds that she might have been resurrected. That would be ludicrous. The only conclusion could be that someone stole her body for some nefarious reason.

And it's interesting because none of the disciples, when they discovered that his body was gone expected that Jesus had risen from the grave either. It didn't even cross their minds. That would be ludicrous. Their first thoughts were, "Someone has stolen his body." We don't have time to look at those passages right now, but read the Gospels for yourselves and see. They didn't believe it until he showed up alive.

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1 Corinthians 15:1-9 (NLT)

¹Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then, and you still stand firm in it. ²It is this Good News that saves you if you continue to believe the message I told you—unless, of course, you believed something that was never true in the first place.

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¹ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p.15

² Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, ©1998, Zondervan Publishing, pg. 225

³ I passed on to you what was most important and what had also been passed on to me. Christ died for our sins, just as the Scriptures said. ⁴ He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. ⁵ He was seen by Peter and then by the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. ⁷ Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles.

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⁸ Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. ⁹ For I am the least of all the apostles. In fact, I'm not even worthy to be called an apostle after the way I persecuted God's church.

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These are all eyewitnesses of the resurrection. They didn't just see an empty grave. They saw the risen Christ. And it was like Paul was saying to his readers in Corinth, "Listen, the vast majority of these people are still alive. Go and talk to them if you don't believe me."

There is one person in this list that is very surprising to me, and that is James. James was the half brother of Jesus. At the beginning of Jesus' ministry his siblings and mother, understandably, thought he was, perhaps, mentally off-balance. I mean, wouldn't you? If someone close to you said they were the Messiah, the Saviour of the world? Of course you would. And so would I.

But then James' brother, Jesus, showed up alive when he was supposed to be dead. And James became a Christ-follower. As a matter of fact, he went on to write one of the books of the Bible, the Epistle of James. There is no other explanation to this than that James, the half brother of Jesus, believed his brother rose from the dead, and was indeed, the Messiah of God who had come to save the world.

Jesus has undeniably risen from the dead. He is alive and that fact is a game changer. If Jesus did not rise from the dead, as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15, we are to be pitied above all people. We have been duped. We've been fed a line and we swallowed the whole thing. We are wasting our time this morning. I am being paid and you are listening to me perpetuate a lie or a fairy tale. But, he *has* risen, and because of that we can have a relationship with a holy God who has our best in mind. That is something to cheer about.

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The fact of the resurrection should change our perspective on all of life.

It is because of the resurrection that we get to experience the God who created the heavens and the earth. That is amazing. The fact of the resurrection should give us hope in the middle of our most trying tribulations, especially when we face the death of a loved one, or our own mortality.

Here's another quote from Lee Strobel. He was interviewing a Christian apologist about the resurrection. After spending hours with him trying to find a hole in his logic, Strobel wanted to ask one more question. He wanted to know what difference the resurrection makes right now.

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"Habermas rubbed his graying beard. The quick-fire cadence and debater's edge to his voice were gone. No more quoting of scholars, no more citing of Scripture, no more building a case. I had asked about the importance of the Resurrection, and Habermas decided to take a risk by harkening back to 1995, when his wife, Debbie, slowly died of

stomach cancer. Caught off guard by the tenderness of the moment, all I could do was listen.

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“I sat on our porch,” he began, looking off to the side at nothing in particular. He sighed deeply, then went on. “My wife was upstairs dying. Except for a few weeks, she was home through it all. It was an awful time. This was the worst thing that could possibly happen.” He turned and looked straight at me. “But do you know what was amazing? My students would call me—not just one but several of them—and say, ‘At a time like this, aren’t you glad about the Resurrection?’ As sober as those circumstances were, I had to smile for two reasons.

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First, my students were trying to cheer me up with my own teaching. And second, it worked. “As I would sit there, I’d picture Job, who went through all that terrible stuff and asked questions of God, but then God turned the tables and asked him a few questions. I knew if God were to come to me, I’d ask only one question: ‘Lord, why is Debbie up there in bed?’ And I think God would respond by asking gently, ‘Gary, did I raise my Son from the dead?’ I’d say, ‘Come on, Lord, I’ve written seven books on that topic! Of course he was raised from the dead.

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But I want to know about Debbie!’ “I think he’d keep coming back to the same question —‘Did I raise my Son from the dead?’ ‘Did I raise my Son from the dead?’ until I got his point: the Resurrection says that if Jesus was raised two thousand years ago, there’s an answer to Debbie’s death in 1995. And do you know what? It worked for me while I was sitting on the porch, and it still works today. It was a horribly emotional time for me, but I couldn’t get around the fact that the Resurrection is the answer for her suffering.

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I still worried; I still wondered what I’d do raising four kids alone. But there wasn’t a time when that truth didn’t comfort me. Losing my wife was the most painful experience I’ve ever had to face, but if the Resurrection could get me through that, it can get me through anything. It was good for 30 A.D., it’s good for 1995, it’s good for 1998, and it’s good beyond that.”

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Habermas locked eyes with mine. ‘That’s not some sermon,’ he said quietly. ‘I believe that with all my heart. If there’s a resurrection, there’s a heaven. If Jesus was raised, Debbie was raised. And I will be someday, too. Then I’ll see them both.’”³

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It is still true today in 2016, friends. There is no greater hope we have than Jesus risen. The fact of the resurrection gives us hope now. If it did not happen we are a pitiful people and we might as well go home right now. But Jesus *did* rise from the dead. The evidence is overwhelming.

Most of you know my father died suddenly about three weeks ago. My dad was rushed into the hospital in Regina with severe pains in his side. They initially said it was constipation and then decided, no it was an aortic aneurysm and they thought they could repair it with a stent. He went into cardiac arrest and a few minutes later and then died.

It was quite a shock to all of us because he had been doing quite well. As a matter of fact he had just preached the day before. Nobody expected him to die yet. There are a couple realities

³ Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 241

that are more real to me now, because of my father's death, more real than they have ever been before. The first is what we have already talked about. One day I am going to be able to see my father again. My siblings and my mother will see him again. That gives us hope because we know that death is not the end. The resurrection of Jesus accomplished this.

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The other truth that is more real to me now than ever before, is that **God is the great reconciler**. That is the business he is in. All of history from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden to the death and resurrection of Jesus two thousand years ago, to his return sometime in the future, is moving towards this end. Everything thing will be made right.

Not only that, but his death and resurrection made a way for us to be reconciled to God now. Adrian talked about this last week. Because God is a holy God, without sin, and we are not, we needed someone to pay the penalty for our sin so we could be reconciled to God, or be made right with him. Jesus' death and resurrection bridged the gap between us and a holy God. The wall of sin that separates us has been broken down, if we accept his free gift.

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2 Corinthians 5:18–6:1 (NLT)

18 And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ. And God has given us this task of reconciling people to him. 19 For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting people's sins against them. And he gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.

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20 So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!" 21 For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.

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1As God's partners, we beg you not to accept this marvelous gift of God's kindness and then ignore it.

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There is so much in this passage. **God is the Great Reconciler**. The death and resurrection of Jesus reconciled us to God. But it goes even further than that. He wants all relationships to be reconciled.

A few days before my dad's memorial service I got together with my six other other siblings and we each took turns telling our stories. What was it like to grow up with each other in the Germo family? We started at 11:00 am and went until 5:00 pm. It was probably the most powerful thing I have ever experienced. As each of us told our stories we understood each other better and we understood ourselves better. Forgiveness was offered and granted for wrongs done. Walls came down. We became a family that loves each other. Don't get me wrong, we loved each other before, but not like this.

It was dad's death that brought us together and broke down all the walls. That is what Jesus' death and resurrection did, but more completely. God is all about restoring relationships. That is the driving force of everything God does. And it should be the driving force of everything we do as well.

Are there relationships in your life that are not right? Do whatever you can to make them right. That is why Paul said,

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Romans 12:18 (NLT)

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

Other translations say, ***As much as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*** Do everything within your power to be reconciled to everyone. If there are relationships in your life that are not what they should be, make them right. As much as it depends on you, do not settle for broken relationships.

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The resurrection made good relationships possible, both with God and with others. If you are here today and you do not have a relationship with God, made possible by Jesus' death and resurrection, please do not leave here today without making peace with God. If there are relationships with others that are not right, do what you can do to make them right. Life will not make sense until you do those two things.

Jesus is the Champion of both life and death. He is on the podium. He defeated Satan, sin and death so good relationships are possible, with God and with each other. Let's live in that truth as we go out today. He is risen!



The Champion
1 Corinthians 15:1-9
Week of March 27th, 2016

Objective of this study: To grasp in a deeper way the reality and impact of Jesus' resurrection for us now.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Isaiah 61:1-4** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you.

Welcome

Who have you cheered for lately?

Word (30 - 45 minutes)

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 15:1-9. In this passage what evidence is there of Christ's resurrection?
3. Read Hebrews 2:14-15; 2 Timothy 1:10; Romans 6:9-11; Hebrews 12:1-2 and look for what has Jesus accomplished by his death and resurrection? This is an observation question. Listen carefully while the passages are read and look for specific things Jesus accomplished.

Work (30- 45 minutes)

The sermon recounted a story of a former atheist, Lee Strobel, whose life took a drastic turn when his wife became a Christian. **“He was pleasantly surprised with the wonderful change in his wife’s character over time.”**

4. What Jesus accomplished through his death and resurrection has huge implications for our lives and relationships. Read the passages again from question number 3. This time listen carefully for the ways our lives will change if we cooperate with Jesus.
5. Jesus' work on the cross not only has implications for our relationship with God, but also with people. Read 2 Corinthians 5:18 to chapter 6:1; Romans 12:18; Isaiah 61:1-4. What is God's heart for our relationships?
6. Spend some time in prayer for each other. Don't just focus on your own felt needs or aunt Bertha's wart, but first spend time praying for your relationships that need healing from Jesus. Ask him to show you what steps to take to make them better.