

[Let's play the *Flash Gordon* theme song as we're setting up the table] In 1980, my friend Matt was 6 years old. In other words, he was old enough to get insanely excited about a new film that had just come out - *Flash Gordon* (come on - sci-fi epic with a soundtrack by Queen? What's not to love?). [movie poster]

The film was released while Matt's family was on vacation, so - as only a young child can, Matt pestered his parents relentlessly to take him to see the film. Finally, on the last day of their vacation, they caved. They promised Matt that if they saw a theater playing it, they'd stop and see *Flash Gordon*.

So of course, Matt was glued to the windows of the car as they drove, diving back and forth across the back seat, eyes relentlessly scanning the streets.

Then he saw it. They were in a run-down section of town - not the best area, but there it was on a marquee. There was something a little off - the first word of the movie was spelled wrong, but Matt didn't care. He began shouting, There it is! There it is! Mom! Dad! *Flash Gordon*! *Flash Gordon*! You promised! You promised!

His parents saw the theater, exchanged a pained grimace, and said, Matt, we're not going to that theater. We can go see the movie another time.

As you can imagine, Matt was devastated. He threw a huge tantrum, screaming at his parents, You promised! You promised! Liars!

But his parents wouldn't cave. Because the theater was not a regular movie theater. It played... adult movies. And the featured film that day was not *Flash Gordon*, but *Flesh Gordon*. [a "censored bar" instead of a movie poster] And Matt's parents didn't think it was the right time to explain to their 6 year old that the differences between the two films were much larger than a single vowel.

So they let their son, whom they loved, fume in the back seat, an apparent victim of his parents' broken promise.

We live in a world of broken promises, don't we? How many of us have been in Matt's shoes, let down, dejected, crushed because someone or something didn't keep their promise? They didn't fulfill our expectations. They didn't keep their word.

How many of us have ever felt that way about God? That God didn't come through, that God broke his promises? Maybe you didn't get something you'd been praying for, like a job. Maybe you were seeking healing for yourself or someone you loved. Maybe you pray for your kids every day and they don't know God. Maybe you did everything right and it didn't matter - they still died.

Whatever your scenario, I bet you know what it's like to just want to kick and scream at God, You promised! You promised! Liar!

If you know that feeling, if you've been there, if you're there right now, then I have some very good news for you: today is Easter Sunday. It's the day we celebrate that Jesus rose from the dead. This day is your proof that God always keeps his promises in the end.

Jesus' resurrection is proof that God loves you and wants the best for you and really and truly is calling you into a life that's fuller than anything else you could possibly choose. That's what God promises us, and by raising Jesus from the dead, he proved that he always keeps his promises.

If that sounds strange to you, consider that the people who watched Jesus die were in the same place we are: as far as they understood, Jesus was God's chosen champion, the person God selected to rescue his people. The scriptures are full of promises about this person - who he would be, what he was going to do.

That's why so many people were excited about Jesus' teaching and life. And Jesus went head-to-head with Rome, an empire who also made promises. Rome called their promises the *Pax Romana*, the Peace of Rome. And they said the same thing as God - follow Rome and Rome will give you life and peace and wealth. [\[Showdown Pic\]](#)

Rome also crucified anyone who said anything different. Which of course Jesus did. He claimed *God* was the source of life and peace and prosperity, not Rome. So Rome arrested him.

Jesus' first followers saw his crucifixion as a showdown between two superpowers. Who's really God: God or Rome? Who can really come through on their promises: God or Rome?

They expected Jesus to hulk out, rise an army of angels and destroy Rome, proving God right once and for all. But instead, Jesus was killed. By Rome.

Talk about a broken promise. It seemed like God lost, that in the end, Rome was stronger.

Except that Friday *wasn't* the end. Three days later, on Sunday morning, Jesus came back to life. His dead body began to breathe again and he stood up and walked out of the tomb he'd been buried in.

Rome had done the worst they could. They'd fired their biggest gun - crucifixion, and it failed. Their best weapon was Death, which turned out to be useless against a God who can raise from the dead.

Easter proves that God's way truly is the way of life. That if we follow him, no matter what else happens, God will keep his promises to us.

This is why Easter is so important. It's easy to wonder, What does Jesus' resurrection have to do with me? Why should I care that Jesus rose from the dead?

We don't mean that in a bad way. Obviously someone coming back to life after being tortured to death is amazing. So it's not that we don't respect Jesus or understand that the resurrection is central to Christianity.

But tomorrow, when I get up and go about my normal day, does it really matter that a guy 2,000 years ago was raised from the Dead?

Yes, it matters a great deal. The fact that God raised Jesus from the dead will change our whole lives if we let it. The resurrection proves that not only did God keep his promises to Jesus. It proves that God keeps his promises to us, too.

[Scripture title slide] If you have a bible, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 15. If you grabbed one of the maroon bibles off the rack on the way in or out of a pew in front of you, you can find 1 Corinthians 15 on page XXX. And if you don't own a bible, we would love for you to take that one and keep it. We bought them for you, so consider it a gift from us.

1 Corinthians is a letter a man named Paul wrote to a group of Christians living in the city of Corinth. Paul wrote around 20 years after Jesus' resurrection, and he's answering a debate among the Corinthian Christians. Many of them don't believe that people *can* come back from the dead. They're saying it's impossible, and that basically the life you have now is all you get, so you should do whatever makes you happy. Let's read together what Paul writes to them, beginning in verse 13:

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave.

But that can't be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world.

But in fact, Christ has been raised from the dead. He is the first of a great harvest of all who have died. -- 1 Corinthians 15:13-20

Paul says, first of all, if there is no resurrection, then Jesus wasn't raised. And if Jesus didn't come back to life, then God doesn't keep his promises and your faith is useless. If Death wins in the end, then it doesn't matter how we live - we're all just sentient meat sacks trying to get a little pleasure before we stop breathing. Jesus' resurrection validates our faith. It proves that God is a god worth following.

But Paul goes on to say that Jesus is the "first of a great harvest". This is a farming metaphor - in agrarian cultures, the first crops to ripen and be harvested were called the first fruits. And farming communities would have huge harvest parties to celebrate the first fruits because they were a preview of the rest of the harvest. If the first fruits were good, the harvest was going to be a good harvest.

Jesus is the first fruit of humanity. We all follow his path - so his resurrection is proof that we're going to be raised too. Jesus' resurrection is proof of our resurrection. The fact that God kept his promise to Jesus is proof that God will keep his promise to us.

[Bring up the American Gods gravity well with God at the center] What else in your life can make that claim? What else that we put our trust in can deliver? Not our jobs. Especially in the last few years, we've been reminded again how even the most stable jobs aren't 100% reliable. Not our technology and progress - those only satisfy us until the next big thing comes along. Not the people we look up to - actors, rock stars, athletes, politicians. We're all too aware they're as fallen and fallible as we are. Not our families - even the best families let us down from time to time. Not our nations - our tribes and groups are comprised of sinful people, and if the core is rotten, so too will the institution be. Even our churches too often get caught up in looking out for themselves instead of caring about the people they're meant to serve.

The fact is that there's no aspect of human culture that's ultimately trustworthy and good. Because we are flawed, broken people, everything we make is flawed and broken. Even Rome couldn't save its Caesars from Death. So too with us today. With all the things in our lives that make us promises they can't keep.

Only God can deliver us from Death. Only God is able to keep his promises. The Resurrection proves that. And the best news of all is that when we choose to follow Jesus, we get access to the power of the resurrection right now.

[Scripture Title Slide] Turn in your Bibles to Romans 8 (which is on page XXX). In chapters 5-7 of this book, Paul has been exploring the nature of that brokenness in our culture. At the end of chapter 7, he cries out in the despair of someone who's come face-to-face with his complete lack of hope in himself, Who will save me from this dying body?!

His answer, our answer is, Thanks be to God, who saves us by Jesus. This week, you should read all of Romans 8 a few times through - it's just amazing. But I want to look at some key verses with you that highlight exactly what's available to us *right now* when we choose to follow Jesus.

In verse 11, Paul says:

The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you...

When we choose to follow Jesus, the Spirit of God, the very power that raised Jesus from the Dead, lives within us. The same power that conquered Death works in us to overcome our tendency to Sin. The power of the resurrection is at our fingertips. God keeps his promises.

But that doesn't mean that we don't still encounter pain, that life with God is all roses and puppy dogs. In verse 18, Paul goes on:

What we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. We were given this hope when we were saved...

Paul says, yes, we still experience the pain of sin. The consequences of brokenness. That's why it feels like God isn't keeping his promises. After all, Jesus himself was killed. But just as we suffer like Jesus did, we will be raised like Jesus was.

That's how Paul can claim what he does in verse 28:

We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

We don't always understand why bad things happen to us. Why we experience pain. Like Matt, we kick and rage and cry out, You promised! You promised! Liar!

But could we imagine that God is much like Matt's parents? That he knows more about our situation than we do, that perhaps giving us what we want *isn't* the best thing? That in order for God to keep his promise to give us life, to be a loving parent to us, to help us flourish, we might have to endure what from our limited, human perspective might look like a tragic injustice?

Could it be that on the other side of *our* resurrection, we'll realize we didn't have a big enough perspective, that we were missing some key information? Could we imagine that we'll look back and say, Thank God you didn't take me to see *Flesh Gordon!*

It's no wonder in v31, Paul goes on to marvel:

What shall we say about such wonderful things as these? If God is for us, who can ever be against us? Since he did not spare even his own Son but gave him up for us all, won't he also give us everything else? Who dares accuse us whom God has chosen for his own? No one—for God himself has given us right standing with himself. Who then will condemn us? No one—for Christ Jesus died for us and was raised to life for us, and he is sitting in the place of honor at God's right hand, pleading for us.

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? No, despite all these things, overwhelming victory is ours through Christ, who loved us.

And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord. -- Romans 8:11, 18-24, 28, 31-39

What can separate you from God's love? Nothing. Anything in this life? No. Can Death itself, the great human enemy, separate us from God? No. Because God has power over even Death. Nothing can separate you from God's love for you. God has promised you life and *nothing* will stop God from keeping that promise. Jesus' resurrection proves that.

So what false promises are you believing today? What paths are you following, hoping they'll lead you to life? All of them end in Death except the path to God, the path Jesus walked before us, through the pain of the Cross and into the glory of the Resurrection.

The only question that's before you today is, Will you join him? Will you follow Jesus? Will you believe in his resurrection, believe in the God who keeps his promises?

Only God is worth your life. Will you give it to him?

Baptisms

Earlier you met our Baptism candidates. These are all people who have chosen to trust God, who believe that God will keep his promise to give them life. The Baptism ritual is a celebration of that choice. It's a picture of the Easter story.

We bring each candidate down into the water. When we dunk them, it's a picture of their symbolic death and burial with Jesus. When they come up out of the water, they rise with Jesus. Baptism is a picture for all of us of their new life with God, and with us in God's church.

Jesus' story is our story. When we follow him, we make his death our death and his life our life. But we all have different roads to get to Jesus. So before we baptize, let's hear how each of our new brothers and sisters came to follow Jesus:

Communion Set-Up

[Communion Slide] Of all the days to celebrate the communion meal together, Easter is most right. This meal is an echo, a symbol of the final meal Jesus shared with his disciples the night before he was killed. That night, he took bread, broke it and passed it to his followers. He said it represented his body, broken for them. Later in the meal, he took a cup of wine and gave it to them to represent his blood, sacrificed to reconnect us with God.

Sitting at that meal, Jesus knew that no matter how dark Friday got, Sunday was coming. He knew that God always brings life, even out of Death. That God always fulfills his promises. That's what this table is about.

We take these wafers to remember Jesus was broken for us, for the choice ever one of us makes to trust things other than God. We dip the wafer in grape juice to remember that because Jesus died, we are reconnected to God. We remember that Jesus' resurrection can be ours too, if we only choose to follow him.

You don't have to be a member of Beavercreek Nazarene to receive Communion here. This is Jesus' table. So consider this: If you're willing to trust God to fulfill his promises to you, if you're willing to trust God with your *life*, to follow him no matter what, then you're invited to Jesus' table.

Let's pray together!

God of Life:

As we gather this morning, we are aware of the pain in our world and in our lives. We confess that we often feel as though we live in a world of broken promises. Thank you for Easter, for this reminder that you always keep your promises. That you are the God who brings life from death.

Thank you for inviting us to your table this morning. As we approach, may you make these wafers and juice to be your body and blood for us. May they become a spiritual medicine that restores our souls, a spiritual food that nourishes us.

May we leave your table reminded again of your faithfulness, your reliability. May we leave confident that you always keep every promise.

We offer these prayers in the powerful and resurrected name of your son, Jesus!