

INTRODUCTION

Story: “*Anybody know whose phone this is?*”

We laugh at a joke because we are *surprised*. We didn’t expect...

Example: CS Lewis on “*laughter*” in *The Screwtape Letters*; Laughter comes from **Joy, Fun**, the **Joke Proper & Flippancy**. And he observed that *the joke proper turns on the sudden perception of incongruity*. Not what...

The Easter story is not what we would have expected. And the benefits of Jesus’ resurrection for us are beyond our expectations.
Does your family have **gift-giving** traditions?

When I was a child I always enjoyed getting **packages** from my grandparents. Sometimes I received more than I ever expected. I would open the package and take out a lovely new shirt and begin to discard the box and paper. But my mother would stop me and suggest I should look inside the box again. Sure enough I found a pair of socks. “*Look again,*” she urged. Digging deeper I found an envelope with a card and some money so I could buy a book that I wanted.

I used to be delighted at those **multiple-gift packages**. I don’t know about you, but usually when I open a package I expect to find one gift not three. A multiple-gift package is not what I **expected**; it’s a pleasant surprise.

Did you know that a multiple-gift package is what God offers you in the gift of His Son?
“*For God so loved the world He gave us His only Son...*”

The Son is the Father’s gift to a world He lovingly created. To a world bruised by sin and starved for love. And Jesus offers not simply a single grace but several. His person & work come to us as a multiple-gift package.

I’m going to open this **gift bag** and show you...

But first I want to sketch you a background **picture**. I want you to imagine the first Resurrection Sunday, to see it in your mind’s eye—then we will consider what gifts the Resurrected Christ makes available.

In all four gospels the resurrection accounts show the disciples gradually “*catching on*” to the incredible news that Jesus was alive and well—that he had been raised from death to a new kind of life—**resurrection life**.

Naturally, his followers were overwhelmed with grief at his crucifixion. For them “*Good Friday*” was anything but good. It was the day **hope died**. So the first news of an empty tomb was perplexing but not reassuring. What did it mean? Maybe someone had stolen the body!

All four gospels report that the **women** were the first to go to the tomb and find it empty. There they saw the stone rolled away and angels told them Jesus had been raised. **Matthew** says that after appearing to the women Jesus told them to tell the disciples. **Mark** says the women were too afraid to speak to anyone...and **Luke** tells us that the Eleven (12 disciples minus Judas) did not believe what the women reported...

“Jesus alive? Risen from the dead? Surely the Master would have told us if he was going to die and then rise from the dead.”

On the evening of Resurrection Sunday Jesus mysteriously appeared to the disciples who had locked themselves in a room out of fear. They had heard about the empty tomb & the angels’ message! But they did not yet believe.

So Jesus gave them the Spirit and commissioned them. In breathing upon them his spirit Jesus was giving them the third part of his multiple-gift package. Jesus offered them the benefits of his death, the benefits of his resurrection life, and the benefits of his spirit.

Now let’s see what is in our package.

1. **CROSS**---Jesus’ *atonement sacrifice, sacrificial death*= FORGIVENESS

We are forgiven.

The gift of forgiveness means *you are accepted* in Christ. You are no longer excluded or estranged because of your sins. Your sins have been covered, paid for, destroyed. This gift we know best because we emphasize it. After our prayer of confession every Sunday morning we hear an **assurance of pardon**. The “words of assurance” are the most powerful ones we hear. *“Friends, believe the good news—in Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven!”* The gift of forgiveness frees us from our past. No matter what we have done, no matter how we have gone astray, no matter who we once were—Christ’s death is sufficient to free us from a past that condemns us. Remember this is a free gift—you cannot earn it or bargain for it.

2. **SEED**---Jesus’ *resurrection* unleashes *power*= A NEW LIFE

We are alive.

But I thought we already were alive. Are you saying that people who are not yet *in Christ* are really dead? Yes, spiritually dead. Listen to the apostle Paul say it! *“But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness.”*

Jesus talked a lot about LIFE in his preaching and teaching. He declared, *“I have come that you might have **life** and have it abundantly.”* After Lazarus had died Jesus told Martha, *“I am the resurrection and the **life**. He who believes in me will **live**, even though he dies; and whoever **lives** and believes in me will never die.”*

Why is this important? In his death Jesus saves us from the penalty of sin. With his resurrected life he saves us from the power of sin.

What good is it if Jesus pardons us for our past sins without helping us deal with our sins today? If my heart cannot be changed, if I cannot learn to live for God instead of for myself, if I cannot share in the new life where I desire to love God and my neighbor, then forgiveness is a hollow victory.

Paul told the Romans, “*We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.*” (6:4) “*The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but **alive** to God in Christ Jesus.*” (10-11)

Are you alive—in Christ Jesus?

A lot of people do not see this aspect of God’s grace. God is not content simply to cancel our past debts; He offers to deposit assets in your spiritual bank account. He wants for you not only to be *associated* with His Son; He wants you to be *connected* to Him, to share in his life.

But some people believe in Christ yet never learn to walk with Him. They accept the pardon from God but never plug into the power of God.

Can you imagine living without electricity because you never bothered to make the connection? You cannot see **electricity**. Does it exist? You cannot see the **resurrection life** of Jesus. Is it available?

Jesus offers you his *life* that, like a *seed*, will grow inside you and transform your life. Eternal life and abundant life! Both are what the Bible calls “*the life of the age to come.*” The new age of the kingdom already has begun with the Resurrection. Christ the King has conquered sin and death. You can connect to his transforming life now. New life is part of the package!

3. BALLOON---wind of the spirit= PRESENCE

Jesus’ third gift is his Spirit. His death offers forgiveness and his resurrection gives us new life. And his spirit enables our hearts to receive the first two gifts. When do we believe in Jesus? When the Spirit regenerates our hearts. When do we live for Christ bearing fruit? When the Holy Spirit empowers us and directs our steps.

The gift of the Spirit means ***we are never alone.*** **At the end of his Great Commission** Jesus promised, “*And lo, I am with you always till the end of the age.*” If Jesus ascended into heaven how could he still be with his disciples? He was with them by means of his **spirit**.

Jesus’ spirit enters our hearts and keeps us connected to Jesus. “*I am the vine and you are the branches. Abide in me...*” Jesus’ presence and guidance and power are ours *in the Spirit*.

What I want you to understand about the great good news (the Gospel) is that these graces are a combination-package offered to you. You don’t have to purchase them separately. In fact you can’t purchase them at all. They are gifts. But they are a package deal! In Christ we

are **forgiven**; we are **alive**; we are not alone! Sometimes Bible teachers and even preachers mistakenly separate these... Like the original disciples perhaps we have not caught on yet!

Example: why do converts fall away? Missed a gift?

For example, we often are more occupied with material needs and pleasures than with pleasing God. God does not forbid the love of food & drink, the enjoyment of better homes & gardens, the appreciation of books & movies; BUT He does frown on us finding our happiness in loving these things.

Suppose a man should make a **ring** for his betrothed and she should love the ring more than her fiancée? *“Our God, dear friends, has given you all things: love Him who made them!”*

Or, consider the example of one who won a contest and sailed on his first cruise. He took along a supply of peanut butter crackers and oranges because he could not afford to purchase meals. But on the last day he discovered all the meals were free! They were included in the package!

CONCLUSION

The **disciple** named **Thomas**, doubting Thomas, slow-to-trust-Thomas, analytical Thomas, empirical Thomas, Thomas the skeptic—Thomas finally did believe when he saw and touched Jesus. *“My Lord and my God,”* he exclaimed. Jesus said to him, *“Because you’ve seen me, you believe. Blessed are they who have not seen and yet who have believed.”*

Faith is the way we receive the gifts of the resurrected Jesus. The root of all valid spirituality is faith. It is a mistake to think of your good works, your obedience or your service as entities apart from faith. By *faith* we receive forgiveness; by *faith* we enter into new life; by *faith* we follow the spirit, by *faith* we care for others, by *faith* we do good deeds...

How do we know if we are growing in this faith? How can we receive assurance our lives are forgiven, animated by His Life and empowered by His Spirit? Look at the fruit in your life (cf. sanctuary flowers). The greatest evidence of resurrection life is love. The fruit of the Spirit is *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*. Do you see which fruit heads the list?

Imagine a Christmas gift pushed up under the tree. No one saw it; no one opened it. Later it was tossed out with the tree. And inside that gift bag was one, no, two, no, three gifts. More than anyone might expect! I wonder what it was that someone missed? I wonder what difference it has made?