

"Mike McKinley has done it again. In this follow-up to his previous book, *The Cross in your Life* (formerly titled *Passion*), Mike focuses on the resurrection of Jesus in a way that is theologically precise, pastorally driven, and practically helpful. *The Resurrection In Your Life* is this faithful, winsome pastor at his best, holding up the prism of the resurrection and showing its biblical layers of beauty and wonder as he turns it for the reader to see. This book is accessible for everyone, written both to capture unbelievers and feed the soul of the discouraged saint who has lost sight of that unshakable hope Jesus secured for those in him. I heartily commend this book and its author."

*Brian Croft, Senior Pastor, Auburndale Baptist Church, Kentucky;
Founder of Practical Shepherding*

"The wonder of Christ's resurrection is put on glorious display in this book. We are taken through the promises of God kept, shown and amplified in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mike charts the unfurling beauty of the resurrection through the writings of Luke, leading to deep theological reflection on the significance of Jesus rising, ascending and ruling, and on the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost. At the same time, he keeps the doctrine rooted in Jesus himself. The result is a book that is simple and striking, surprising us as it shows us Jesus. I plan on recommending this book widely."

John Hindley, Pastor of BroadGrace, Norfolk; author of "Serving Without Sinking" and "You Can Really Grow"

"Mike McKinley has now written a worthy sequel to *The Cross in Your Life*. It is a rich feast of prose, both in style and substance. The cross and the resurrection of Jesus Christ stand as two powerful truths which form the very heart of Christianity. And McKinley's excellent literary capturing of these two profound realities are a joy to read and reflect upon. It will show how the resurrection applies to your most fundamental needs in life, death and beyond. And it will cause you to bow down and worship the One who died and rose again on your behalf."

Lance Quinn, Pastor, Thousand Oaks Bible Church, California

“Mike McKinley has once again provided a sparkling exposition on a key moment in the life of Jesus and the history of the world. Too often the resurrection is neglected as a mere appendix to the cross, but Mike shows its everyday relevance with clarity, wit and wonderful encouragement. This is highly recommended.”

Sam Allberry, Associate Pastor of St Mary's Maidenhead; author of "Is God Anti-Gay?" and "Lifted: Experiencing the Resurrection Life"

MIKE McKINLEY



THE
RESURRECTION
IN YOUR LIFE



How the living Christ
changes your world

About the author

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For my Mom,
whose life and love
is a picture of God's grace.



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How the Living Christ Changes Your World
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INTRODUCTION

THE STORY DOESN'T STOP



I love stories. Some of my favorite childhood memories are set in my hometown's local library, where I would load up on books to devour on long summer days. (Yes, I was a major nerd, thanks for asking.)

Now that I have five kids of my own, I spend far more time reading stories to them than I do working through the stacks of novels on my bedside table. And whether it is reading *Cinderella* to my preschool set or *Around the World in 80 Days* to my older kids, most great stories seem to follow the same basic outline. First, there's an introduction to the main character and his or her world (meet Cinderella). Next up comes the main character's problem (Cinderella's family is unkind to her), and then a potential solution that holds the promise of happiness (a fairy godmother and a good-looking prince!) But then, just when you think things are going to end well, there's a crisis that calls everything into question (the stroke of midnight!) Only at the end do we get the final resolution that makes sense of the crisis and assures the happiness of the main character (a duke with a glass slipper and a whole bunch of happily ever after!)

Now, imagine how badly it would mess up kids if we stopped reading all of their favorite stories before the end;

if we left Cinderella an unmarried maid, forever looking back on her one night at the ball. Or if we left Harry Potter dead on the floor after Voldemort's curse. Of course, sooner or later they'll come across books without a happy ending—those adult novels where the ending is sad, clever, and leaves us desperate inside because there's something in us that demands a happy ending in a book, even if we've learned not always to expect it in life. The most satisfying stories finish on a note of hope, with at least a hint of happiness.

Well, the story of the Bible is most certainly not a fairy tale. But with God as its author, it has all of the hallmarks of a great story. At the beginning we are introduced to the main character of God's creation (humanity) and a serious problem (sin, rebellion and death). There's a promising solution to the problem (God's sent his very own Son), but then a terrible crisis that seems to undo everything (mankind crucified him!). It is only at that point that we see the final resolution that shows us the meaning of the cross and assures us that the story ends well for humanity: the resurrection and ascension of Jesus.

For Christians, the story that makes sense of our lives doesn't end with a suffering, crucified Savior. The cross is vitally important to our faith, but only because Jesus rose from the grave and ascended into heaven for us.

The resurrection matters. You know that already if you are a Christian; but do you know *why* it matters? Often, we can end up treating the resurrection as though it were God's way of tying up the loose ends; the cross is where everything important happens, but then there's a dead body that needs dealing with. Or we can be so busy trying to prove the resurrection really happened that we forget to be excited *that* it happened.

Of course, the cross is wonderful and foundational for our lives and human history. It's why I wrote the book that this is the sequel for, *The Cross In Your Life* (or, as it was originally titled, *Passion*), about the events of the last 24 hours of Jesus' earthly life; and (more importantly) it's why we'll spend eternity praising Jesus, the Lamb who was slain.

But the great thing is... there's more. The story doesn't stop at the wooden cross. It doesn't stop at the empty tomb. In fact, what's really amazing about this story is that it doesn't end, and will never end. When I come to the end of a great novel, I am sad that I have to leave it behind. The characters I had come to love and the world that I had entered into is all gone (until the sequel!) But the story of Jesus doesn't end. In many ways, it begins where it seemed to have ended—at his grave. The risen Jesus ascended into heaven and poured out his Spirit on his people so that we can live our lives in his resurrection power. At this moment, the joy and power of the resurrection, and its implications and impact are still being felt round the world, in millions of lives. It's a story with a page being written right now; every Christian finds himself or herself in the middle of the greatest story ever, the story of God's plan to save a people for his own glory. It's a story that has no final chapter, that extends into eternity with God, because the great ending (death) gets its teeth kicked in on page one.

This book is fundamentally about God's great What Happened Next; about his eternal Happy Ending. It is about the greatest story ever told, the story that is true, and the story that is (or could be) yours. If you are considering Christianity, I hope you'll see how your life needs to become part of this great narrative. And if you are a Christian—whether you have been following the Risen Jesus for

days or for decades—my prayer is that your hearts will be captivated by the story of what the Risen Jesus has done, is doing and will do, and that your life will be lived out in light of it.

CHAPTER ONE

HE IS NOT HERE



⁵⁴ It was Preparation Day, and the Sabbath was about to begin.

⁵⁵ The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. ⁵⁶ Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.

¹ On the first day of the week, very early in the morning, the women took the spices they had prepared and went to the tomb. ² They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, ³ but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. ⁴ While they were wondering about this, suddenly two men in clothes that gleamed like lightning stood beside them. ⁵ In their fright the women bowed down with their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, "Why do you look for the living among the dead? ⁶ He is not here; he has risen! Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ⁷ 'The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again.'" ⁸ Then they remembered his words.

⁹ When they came back from the tomb, they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others. ¹⁰ It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles.

¹¹ But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense. ¹² Peter, however, got up and ran to the tomb. Bending over, he saw the strips of linen lying by themselves, and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened.

Luke 23 v 54 – 24 v 12

There are few things that hurt more than your greatest hopes being utterly dashed. It is tough to top the misery of having all of your dreams come crashing down around you. When this kind of disappointment comes, it turns everything upside down—your past, your present and your future. *How could I have put my hope in something that wasn't true? This hurts so much, I can't think without it being right at the forefront of those thoughts. All the things I've been looking forward to will never, ever happen.*

If you have ever had your heart broken by someone you loved, or had a hero of yours prove to be a fraud, you know the feeling I'm talking about. It's like being punched in the stomach; it almost literally takes your breath away.

I wonder if that's how Jesus' followers were feeling on Friday evening after his crucifixion. We are diving into the Gospel of Luke almost at its end, with only just over a chapter to go. And to Jesus' friends, it was the end. Jesus' lifeless body had been wrapped in a shroud and placed in a tomb. Imagine the intense sense of loss that Mary Magdalene and Joanna and the other women must have been feeling. They would never see Jesus again. They would never again share in the joy of Jesus' friendship, his wise advice, or the loving care they had come to treasure from him. All they were left with was the vivid memory of his humiliation, his suffering, and his defeat at the hands of his enemies.

Perhaps worst of all, every hope that had grown up in their souls over the previous three years was now completely dashed. They had thought of Jesus as more than just a wise teacher and close friend; they had called him "Lord" and looked forward to the day when he would take his place as ruler over the nation of Israel. To lose a close friend would have been bad enough; but they had lost

all their hopes, too. There would be no coming kingdom of God. There would be no glorious restoration of God's people. All they had left to do was to rest on the Sabbath (Friday night into Saturday), and then finish caring for their dead friend's body on the Sunday. A week before, all had been hope. Now, all was grief.

When we think about the events of the first Easter, it's easy to rush to the Sunday morning. But pause, and wait, and think. Take time to come alongside these grieving women—because it's only when you get inside the dashed hopes of these ladies that you are prepared to begin to appreciate what happens next.

He is Not Here

When the women arrived at the tomb early on that Sunday morning, they found three things that they were not expecting. First, the stone had been rolled away from the entrance to the grave. In those days, tombs were covered by a heavy stone; it would have required two fairly strong people to budge it. It must have been a relief when they walked up to the grave and saw that the stone was already moved for them.

The second surprise the women encountered was that the body of the Lord Jesus was no longer there. You can understand why that would have been startling for them; dead bodies don't run out to the corner store for a pint of ice cream. Their thoughts must have run wild: was this the work of vandals? Was this some kind of sick joke? Hadn't these past two days been heartbreaking enough? And now this! Relief must have turned to despair.

Then came the third shock to their system. Two men were standing beside the tomb in dazzling apparel. Luke

does not tell us who they were, but it seems a pretty safe bet that these were angels from the Lord. A very high percentage of people in the Bible who show up in bright, shining clothing turn out to be angels—and the Gospels of Matthew and John spell out that these dazzling figures were indeed heavenly messengers.

These angels ask a very strange question: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” The answer seems pretty obvious: the women are not looking for the living! The last time they saw Jesus, he was dead. Their last glimpse of him was him being laid in his tomb. Everything in their experience of death taught them that this was a terminal condition—the only One who had seemed to be able to overpower death had now succumbed to it. And so they knew that Jesus would be “among the dead.” Of course they did!

But in fact, they were completely, wonderfully wrong. “He is not here; he has risen.” Jesus is not dead; he is alive. He should be spoken of in the present tense, not the past.

He has risen. Three words that can wipe away all the loss and grief of the past days. Three words that change everything. He has risen. Minutes before, the women had known he was dead. But they were utterly mistaken. He has risen.

The Wonder of Being Wrong

Normally we don’t enjoy being proven wrong. I know that I sometimes go to great lengths to avoid having to admit that I was in error about something. But for these women, being wrong was the best thing in the world! These women thought the death of Christ was the end; it was proof that he could not save them; it was the burial not only of their

friend, but their hopes. And they were totally and gloriously wrong! The resurrection turns everything we know on its head. Death leads to life, weakness and suffering give way to glory, crushed dreams give way to living hope.

In a sense, becoming a Christian means being given eyes to see that you have been wrong. Whereas previously Jesus just seemed like some guy—a great teacher, a moral instructor, an irrelevant ancient martyr—now you can see that you were as wrong as you could be. Now you see that he is the living Lord, the one who gives life and peace and rest to all those who will come to him by faith. It's a wonderful thing when you realize that you've been wrong in that way!

Lots of great stories have some big revelation that makes you rethink everything that you thought was true before. In *Star Wars*, Darth Vader is Luke Skywalker's father (and Princess Leia's as well). Bruce Willis' character in *The Sixth Sense* is really (spoiler alert) dead. A fair way through *The Hunger Games*, we discover that Katniss Everdeen is really a pawn in a much larger rebellion against the Capital. When you have those pieces of information in place, you see the entire world of the film or novel differently. You realize that you have been misunderstanding much of the story up until that point. All that you thought you knew is now up for grabs.

The resurrection of Jesus is that moment in human history. It's the reality that flips everything on its head. Before you have eyes to see the risen Jesus, death is the end of everything. But once you can see him in that way, death becomes the entrance point to eternal life. Think about it for a second: one of the most self-evident and painful facts of human existence—that death is the end—turns out to be gloriously wrong. In fact, death is the door at which the

Christian leaves behind sin and suffering and weakness, and enters into eternal life in the presence of Jesus.

This is why Peter can say that Christians suffer trials “for a little while” (1 Peter 1 v 6), even when there was no hope that the persecution his readers were experiencing would come to an end in this life. This life is not, as previously suspected, all there is—in the great span of eternity, it is only “a little while”! This is why the author of Hebrews can say that Christians have been set free from the fear of death (Hebrews 2 v 15). Death is not, as it always seemed, the end; it is the end of the beginning, and the beginning of eternity. The resurrection of Jesus changes the way we think about everything. He has risen. Everything is up for grabs.

As He Told You

It’s hard for us to imagine the surprise that the women felt when they discovered the empty tomb. We are familiar with the story; there is enough residual Christian memory in western culture that most people on the street know that Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. But these women didn’t have a lifetime of Easter baskets and eggs creating space in their brains for the resurrection. When they showed up at the garden, they were fully expecting to find Jesus still in the grave.

And yet, perhaps they shouldn’t have been so surprised. The angels that greeted the women told them that they should have expected Jesus not to be among the dead. Why? Because Jesus had explained it already: “Remember how he told you, while he was still with you in Galilee: ‘The Son of Man must be delivered over to the hands of sinners, be crucified and on the third day be raised again’” (Luke 24 v 6-7).

So while we can sympathize with the women's confusion, the angel reminds them that Jesus had told them to expect this. Specifically, Jesus had told his followers that after he was betrayed and crucified, he would be raised again on the third day. If you look at just two examples from the Gospel of Luke, you can see what the angels were talking about:

- "And he said, 'The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life.'" (Luke 9 v 22)
- "Jesus took the Twelve aside and told them, 'We are going up to Jerusalem, and everything that is written by the prophets about the Son of Man will be fulfilled. He will be handed over to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him and spit on him; they will flog him and kill him. On the third day he will rise again.'" (Luke 18 v 31-33)

These women had followed Jesus to Jerusalem. They had seen him angrily rejected by the religious elites; had seen him handed over to the Roman governor to hear his death sentence; had watched the mockery, rage and spittle rain down on him; had seen the whip lash his back; had seen him killed. As Jews, they counted part days as a day—so the Sunday was the third day.

And they had forgotten the one thing that had not yet happened: "He will rise again."

Now, corrected by the angels, they have their "Aha" moment: "They remembered his words" (24 v 8). You can imagine all of the pieces falling into place like the tumblers in a combination lock that spring the whole

device open when they come together. Now everything makes sense.

But not to everyone. The women return to the other disciples, explaining to the men what the angels had explained to them. You can imagine how excited the women were to tell everyone the good news that would turn their sadness into celebration! But the whole scene falls flat: “Their words seemed to them like nonsense” (v 11). The men thought the women were crazy. Their hearts were locked shut.

How could the disciples be so dense? Even if they didn’t anticipate the resurrection, they certainly should have been able to see the connection between the teachings of Jesus and the reports of the women coming back from the burial site. But instead of putting the pieces together, the apostles thought their story was “nonsense.” Only Peter (and John, the Gospel of John adds) bothered to go to the tomb to see for himself; he saw the evidence, and yet, where the women had left announcing the resurrection, Peter “went away, wondering to himself what had happened.”

You and I are in a different position than the people in Luke’s narrative. We stand on the far side of the cross and resurrection. It’s much easier for us to step back and see how those events fit in with the bigger picture of Jesus’ life and teaching. We can see how the ending of the story makes sense of all the parts that came before it.

But my guess is that there are times and situations in your life where you can understand a little bit of what the apostles and the women were feeling. The pain of the crucifixion caused them to forget and ignore the promises of the resurrection. And perhaps you have felt such loss and pain that it seemed, or still seems, impossible to remember and believe God’s promises. Maybe there are seasons in

your life when it feels like God's plan has gone awry and that any talk of hope seems like nonsense to you. Maybe you are very aware of the reality of death; you stare at it, but you can't stare through it.

In those times, remember the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. He has risen. Remember that trials and problems do not take God by surprise. The darkness of midnight does not mean that dawn is never coming; in fact, the longer we've been in the darkness, the closer we are to the dawn. Jesus kept his word to his followers; he suffered, and then he rose. If he was able to keep that promise, you can be sure that he will keep all of his promises to you.

So when you lose your job or illness comes, remember the promise that God makes in his word: "God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4 v 19).

And when the dark cloud of depression won't lift, remember that when we bring our troubles to God in prayer, he promises that "the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4 v 7).

And when sin and temptation are clinging closely, remember that God promises that they will not overwhelm you: "God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it" (1 Corinthians 10 v 13).

And when the desires of your heart seem out of reach, remember the words that God spoke to Paul when the apostle pleaded for relief from the "thorn in my flesh" (2 Corinthians 12 v 7): "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness" (v 9).

You can trust Jesus. He has risen. If he kept a promise to rise from the dead, you can be sure that he will keep every other promise as well.

If you are a Christian, there are likely times in your own life when, now you look back, you can see God bringing you through, even though at the time you wondered where he was. And if you are a Christian, then you can always look back to the moment that changed your whole life, when some hopeless women discovered an empty tomb. The angel's gentle rebuke to the women speaks to us in situations when hope seems gone and the future looks bleak: "Remember how he told you..." Look at your own life, but ultimately look back at the empty tomb. Jesus always keeps his promises.

A Living Savior

In the rest of this book, we are going to flesh out some of the wonderful ways that the reality of Jesus' resurrection changes the way we live. But for now, just stop and realize that the fact that Jesus rose from the dead means that he is the only one who can save us. A couple months after this Sunday morning, the apostle Peter—whose wondering had by then turned to rock-solid conviction—told the elites who had killed Jesus that God had raised him from the dead and then concluded:

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. (Acts 4 v 12)

The resurrection is proof that Jesus is able save us. If Jesus were still in his tomb, he'd merely be the pitiable victim of state-sponsored violence and religious intolerance, a tragic lesson in the cruelty of the world. But that's not Jesus, because he is not dead. In the movies, the filmmak-

ers demonstrate the incredible power of a certain character by showing that person surviving an overwhelming assault. So, for example, Iron Man gets hit with a nuclear warhead and then a 70-storey-high building collapses on him. And you know that Iron Man is a hard, hard man when he emerges triumphantly out of the smoking rubble. The evil guys took their best shot and couldn't defeat him; and because they failed to defeat him, they are now in a lot of trouble.

Well, the resurrection of Jesus is that same idea, only true! Death and sin and the devil took their best shot; they did their worst; they killed the Son of God. But Jesus wasn't defeated. He has risen. Death, the great implacable enemy of all humanity, which reduces all our achievements and accumulations to dust, has been crushed.

And so where else are you going to find a Savior like this? We live in a world with a million false saviors. There are countless religions to follow. And there are so many secular saviors, too: our careers, our bank accounts, our children, our sex lives—all promise hope and meaning. All of those things offer us a kind of salvation, the illusion of lasting purpose and meaning and joy. But they never deliver; they always leave us empty and wanting more. Life will conspire to take its best shot at all of those would-be saviors: the economy collapses and you lose the dream job; a loved one lets you down; false rumors ruin your reputation. None of those things are bullet-proof. The fact is, you can only be completely saved by one person, the indestructible risen Lord Jesus Christ. The things you fear most took their best shots at him; and he defeated them.

That's why it's so important that Mary Magdalene and Joanna and the other women found an empty tomb on that Sunday morning. That's why our faith is founded

on the fact that the Jesus who was crucified and buried later rose from the dead in glory and is seated at the right hand of God the Father in heaven. Our salvation is not found in his teaching or his philosophy or his example; if it were, we wouldn't need him to be alive. We could just read about him and his ways.

But Jesus himself *is* our Savior. A dead Jesus couldn't save anyone. But Jesus isn't dead. He's alive right now—and so we can go to him in faith and find salvation. We can find help in our time of need. We can find mercy when we are struggling. We can find grace when we are tempted to sin. We can find comfort when we are afraid. We can know hope in the face of death—even our own death—all because he is not in his tomb; he has risen.

For Reflection:

- *Think back to the time when you became a Christian, or understood your childhood faith for the first time. In what sense were you being shown that you had been wonderfully wrong?*
- *How will knowing that Jesus keeps his promises change the way you're looking at your day today?*
- *"Where else are you going to find a Savior like this?" Where are you tempted to look for alternatives? How will the empty tomb encourage you to look to Christ?*

*Jesus lives! Thy terrors now
Can no longer, death, appall us;
Jesus lives! By this we know
Thou, O grave, canst not enthrall us.
Alleluia!*

*Jesus lives! Henceforth is death
But the gate of life immortal;
This shall calm our trembling breath
When we pass its gloomy portal.
Alleluia!*

*Jesus lives! For us he died;
Then, alone to Jesus living,
Pure in heart may we abide,
Glory to our Savior giving.
Alleluia!*

*Jesus lives! our hearts know well
Nought from us his love shall sever;
Life, nor death, nor powers of hell
Tear us from his keeping ever.
Alleluia!*

*Jesus lives! to him the throne
Over all the world is given:
May we go where he has gone,
Rest and reign with him in heaven.
Alleluia!*

*“Jesus lives! Thy Terrors Now” by Christian Friedrich Gellert
(translated Frances E. Cox)*