

# Easter Sunday

(Slide 1- chick) Add my welcome. Happy easter – first day or coming for decades...

(Slide 2 – games) I love games. I always have. 20's lived with my brother and his wife. Young son Alex. 6. Alex loved games. He was a terrible loser. Even worse winner. His mum had enough. Alex whether you win or lose uncle simon you have to say well done thanks for playing. Didn't work. Win: well done thanks for playing. Lose: well done

If you're a good loser or a bad loser – one time when we all lose. Death. Here's my favourite tombstone. "I told you I was sick."

(slide 3 – tombstone) We laugh. But our laughter hides our fear. Death's not funny is it. Death is the greatest enemy of mankind. Death rate last time I checked was 100%. Everyone dies. Throughout history mankind has tried to escape death. From Egyptians with their mummies to modern cosmetic surgery. It's all an attempt to try to escape or put off death.

It's because of this that an estimated 2.4 billion people celebrate easter. If you are here seems a bit of a mystery. Singing – people jumping up and down...shouting out

Why are we so excited? It's because of this claim – that Jesus is not dead. He is alive...

(slide 4 – jerusalem) I heard a story of a man and his wife who went on holiday to Jerusalem. They toured the Holy Land but fought the whole time as they had throughout their long marriage. Then suddenly the man keeled over and died. His widow saw the undertaker who said to ship the body home is going to cost £5000. I can't afford that said the widow, distraught. The undertaker had pity on her – look I can bury him here for £500. The widow thought about it – no she said I'll find the money – arrange to have him shipped home. The undertaker didn't understand it – I have an excellent place to bury him here for a fraction of the cost – why would you ship him home. "It's like this" she replied. "A long time ago a man died here. He was buried here. Three days later he came back from the dead. **I just can't take that chance.**

(slide 5 – jesus) That's the claim of Christians across the world. Jesus is alive!

Bible says that God has spoken through creation. God has spoken through history. God's greatest revelation was in Jesus Christ.

**Here's a good question. How do we know that Jesus is the one.** That's a really good question thanks for asking...

It's not just based on his life. So kind. Not just based on his teaching. So wise...

**Based on his resurrection.**

The resurrection of Jesus is the most important event in history. If it actually happened then nothing is the same because death itself has been defeated by someone.

It also means that every other claim that Jesus made must be true. He claimed that he was the only one who could reconnect us to God. He claimed that if we trusted in him we would be forgiven for our sin. He claimed that he would put his holy spirit in us so that we could live a different type of life. He claimed that he would give us eternal life. If Jesus rose from the dead then He is the one and the only Hope for all mankind.

**It's kind of a big deal. I want to take a few minutes to explain 3 ways that people come to believe this. End of the message I'm going to give you the opportunity to put your trust in Jesus.**

(slide 6 – john) Read to you from one of the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection that we find in the bible. One of Jesus' disciples – a man named John – wrote his account down for us. Many different translations of the bible into english. Good news translation. Message Translation. There's the ESV, NIV. Many good translations. I thought I'd read the story to you John's story from a new translation that not many have heard of BCT - Bedford Contemporary Translation. Here's the story...John Chapter 20

(slide 7 – cross) So Jesus, the great teacher, healer, prophet even some would say - was crucified. He was dead. If the cross didn't kill him then the spear thrust through his heart by trained romans killers would have done it. I was there. I saw it. He was dead alright - deader than dead.

(slide 8 – tomb) Buried in a tomb and there was this rumour that something weird was going to happen after he died so they sealed the tomb with massive stone. Guards placed outside. We were gutted.

(slide 9 – mary) Then there was Mary. Mary Magdalene. Mad Mary some called her. She was the one Jesus had driven 7 demons out of – trust me you don't want to see the **extended directors cut** of that scene. Well she was always hanging around us disciples. Anyway, she goes to the tomb very early - still dark. She comes running back - Jesus' body has gone. He's gone! The stone's moved and he's gone she says. I can't find the body anywhere.

(slide 10 – john) Simon Peter and the disciple that Jesus loved. That's me by the way. I know the others hated it when I said that but what can you do if you're the favourite. Anyway Simon Peter and I ran to the tomb. Mad Mary used to be as crazy as a bag of ferrets but she was no idiot now. Something was up – we wanted to see for ourselves. Old Pete was a bit on the large side. Not fat – but I always said that in the feeding of the 5000 the real miracle was that even Pete had enough to eat.

(slide 11 – dawn) Dawn was just breaking as we ran to the tomb. I was a faster runner and got there first. I know that seems like an irrelevant detail in the most important story ever told but I've always been a little bit competitive.

(slide 12 – empty) Anyway, I looked in from the doorway and saw for myself - Mary was right. There was no body.

(slide 13 – peter) Pete arrives and walks straight in. We were stunned - the cloths used to wrap the body were all there.

(slide 14 – grave clothes) That was the crazy bit - grave robbers would have taken them cos they were worth a fortune. Standing there in that tomb - looking at it all - I believed. But we didn't really know what to do - so we went back home.

(slide 15 – mary) Arrgh. Later found out we so missed the real action. Mary - you know Mad Mary - she comes back. It was dark when she had come to she came back for a better look she said. Two mahoosive angels were sat down where the body was. They said to her why are you crying. She's like duh - "because the one person who made sense of everything is dead and now they've stolen his body." She always had a bit of a temper on her did Mary – didn't matter who you were.

Anyway she turns round and there's this guy there. He says "why are you crying. who are you looking for". She's like "what is this can't a girl have a good old sob with a bit of privacy." She thinks he's the gardener - I don't know why - so she says "if you know where he is please tell me". He says one word. "Mary". She told me later she just lost it. She knew that voice that was the same voice that set her free from those dangly demons all those years ago. She fell down at his feet "Master". He tells her not clinging on to him because he hasn't yet ascended - and then that she should go and tell his brothers that he was ascending to my father and your father to my God and your God. Woah - he's never called us brothers before. So she ran for it - she came bursting in "I've seen the Lord"

(slide 16 – lock) It confirmed what I thought but to be honest the others didn't know what to think...So we set the precedent for all future christians. What do you do when you don't know what to do. **Have a meeting.** Locked the doors because the jewish leaders were nutters - madder than mad Mary but with swords.

(slide 17 – jessu) Then suddenly he appears. He said "Shalom." Peace be with you. He showed us his hands and side. Then he commissioned us - as the Father sent me I'm sending you. Breathed on us. Receive the Holy Spirit. Tell you what they've got some great breath mints in heaven -

There was a problem Thomas missed it. I thought I was bad. Tommy. What a plum. Even worse when we told him, he didn't believe us. So he says "unless I put my hands in his

side and place my fingers in the mark of the nails in his hands I will never believe.” I thought to myself you my friend are about to be the biggest prize banana in the history of award winning bananas.

It wasn't long. About 8 days later. We're together again - another meeting. Jesus appears again. Funny thing was - he didn't look at any of us. All eyes turned to thomas. He went a shade of white. Green. Jesus says put your hands in my side and see my hands. Don't disbelieve but believe.

(slide 18 – thomas) Thomas though said something extraordinary. My Lord and My God. I was a bit freaked out at the time - that's blasphemy - it wasn't til later that I realised that old Doubting Tommy got the last laugh. He'd grasped something that the rest of us didn't get til later. My Lord and My God.

then Jesus said to thomas “Have you believed because you've seen me. There's a special blessing on those who haven't seen me but still believe.”

### **That my friends - is my story.**

(slide 19 ) Three people or groups of people come to faith

#### **1/ John came to faith. They saw the evidence**

(slide 20 ) John who wrote the eyewitness account that we read said that he came to faith standing in the empty tomb. He saw the evidence – the stone rolled back, the folded grave clothes – he writes in John 20:8 “I saw and believed”

Same today – many come to faith based on the evidence. The evidence is so strong...

18<sup>th</sup> century Gilbert West he didn't like that a lot of his friends were becoming christians. Decided to write a book disproving the resurrection. Half way through he encountered Jesus so he wrote his book the other way round.

19<sup>th</sup> century Man called Lou Wallis write a book – chapter 4. He met Jesus so he wrote his book the other way round and called it “Ben Hur.”

20<sup>th</sup> Century – lawyer and journalist Frank Morrison. Disprove Christianity. He got so much evidence - halfway through the book he met Jesus. His book is called “who moved the stone.”

So if you're in a hurry to meet Jesus **try and write a book to disprove the resurrection.**

**You've got the evidence of the empty tomb.** Numerous eyewitnesses shared that Jesus was dead and buried and yet the tomb was empty.

**You've got the evidence of the resurrection appearances.** Over 500 people claimed to have seen him and many wrote about their claim preserving it for all time. And it wasn't just fans of Jesus. It was enemies and sceptics. Who here has a brother who thinks he's God? Who believes him. Yes Jesus' own brother James who doubted Jesus' claims to be God before his death converted and became a leader in the early church after Jesus was raised from the dead and appeared to him.

**You've got the evidence of the rise of Christianity out of nothing** – a backwater place in a backwater time in history. Yet a handful of uneducated fishermen turned the whole world upside down based on this claim – that Jesus was not dead but alive. Tortured, persecuted, murdered but they would not change their story.

I don't have time no to go into detail and you can read for yourself books like Lee Strobel's Case for Christ or CS Lewis' Mere Christianity or any number of other books looking at the evidence. When I was growing up going to church I thought that Christianity was all based on myth and legend. Realised I was wrong. **I am a Christian today because of the evidence.**

## 2/ Mary came to faith. She heard his voice.

(slide 21) **Second person who comes to faith. Mary.** Mary was confused. She didn't know what to make of it. Until she heard Jesus' voice. "Mary." She knew. She believed.

Jesus said that he was like a good shepherd 'calls his own sheep by name...and his sheep know his voice' (10:3-4). Even as Christians we can forget that. Recently I was stressing about some decision I had to make. Wait – stop. He is a good shepherd – his know his voice. I'm his sheep. Baa. Peace. **We can be so focussed on our own voices that we forget to listen to his voice.**

Same today. Many come to faith because they recognise that Jesus is calling them – has been calling them all their lives.

That was my story. I was 19 – an atheist. Yet one night I heard his voice. I felt the weight of his presence in my room. I had questions, I had doubts even – but his voice was irresistible. I wept. Jesus I will follow you. Later when I looked back over my life I knew that I had heard his voice many times – sometimes in good times – sometimes in bad times – calling me to follow him.

I was speaking recently in a meeting like this one and one woman at the end who was a muslim put her faith in Jesus. I asked her about it she said "**it was like no one else was here – you were just speaking to me**". But that wasn't me. I don't have that power. She heard Jesus' voice.

Some of you have felt that today. Even as I'm speaking or through the stories of those baptised or even just through life in general. You've heard his voice. Feel it in your heart...

I am a christian today because I've heard his voice.

## 3/ Peter. Thomas & the other disciples came to faith - they encountered Jesus.

(slide 22) Peter and the other disciples encountered the risen Lord Jesus.

Might say well it's ok for them – they saw the resurrected Jesus. John 20:29 Jesus said to Thomas, "Have you believed because you have seen me? There's a special blessing for those who have not seen and yet have believed."

I can't see the wind but I can encounter the winds power.

Many have that experience today.

Some **encounter him in dreams or visions.** Like a man I met who's wife was a christian – he mocked her, hated her. Then one night dream – Jesus baptised him. He woke his wife up – what do I need to become a christian.

Some **encounter his power to heal.** Woman we prayed for two weeks ago – rheumatoid arthritis for 10 years constant pain. Prayed for and within 2 minutes she was pain free. She encountered Jesus.

**Many encounter the power of his forgiveness.** Like my friend who was in debt, sin and mess in his life. Put his trust in Jesus and washed clean.

Christian here today – carry his power with you.

I am a christian today because I've encountered Jesus. I haven't physically seen him like Peter saw him. But I've encountered his power to heal, his ability to change lives, his work in my heart. I'm a christian today because I've encountered Jesus.

## Conclusion

I meet many who want to hold God to ransom. God if you appear in front of me then I'll believe. It doesn't work like that. In the bible God says **“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart”**. I have to come to God humbly. I have to realise that he is God and I am not. If I seek God with honest, humble heart. You will find him. He's waiting for you.

It doesn't matter how you come to faith in Jesus. Evidence. His Voice. Encounter with him. Or any other way. It doesn't matter how. Just that you do.

It's come to that moment. I want to ask you. Do you want to put your trust in Jesus. Everyone to close their eyes. Ask you to raise your hand if you choosing for the first time today to follow him. Then I'm going to pray and prayer – ask you to pray a prayer.